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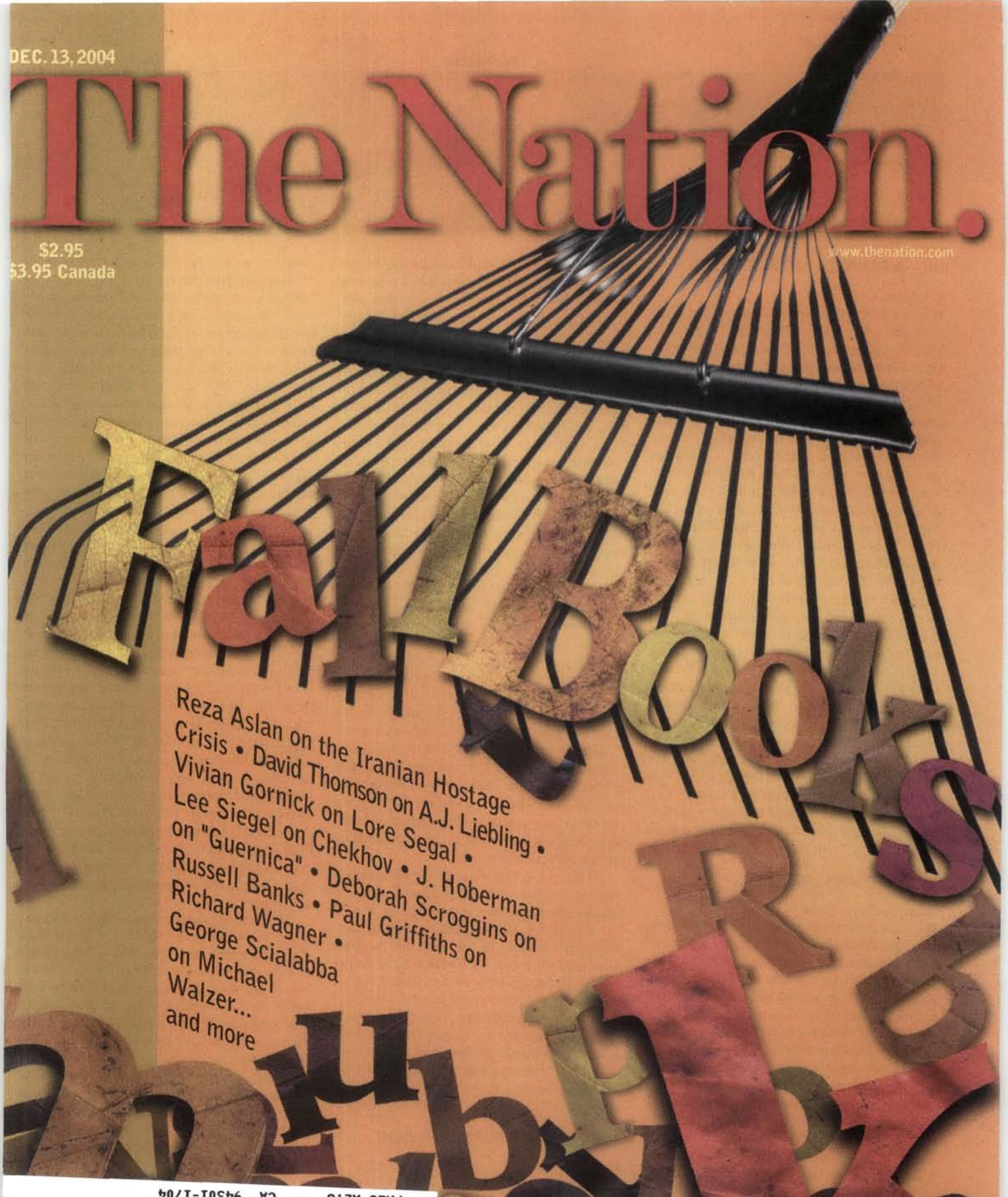

Fall Books

Reza Aslan on the Iranian Hostage Crisis • David Thomson on A.J. Liebling • Vivian Gornick on Lore Segal • Lee Siegel on Chekhov • J. Hoberman on "Guernica" • Deborah Scroggins on Russell Banks • Paul Griffiths on Richard Wagner • George Scialabba on Michael Walzer... and more

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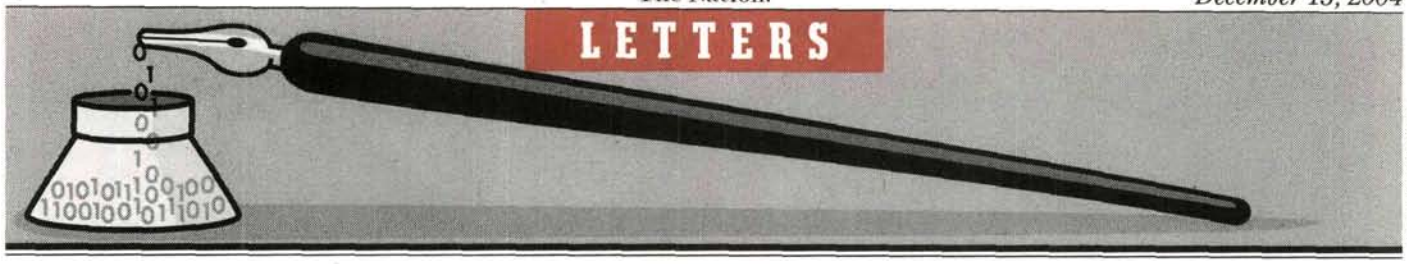

CHRISTOPH NIEMANN

OIL—A REFINED IRAQ SCHEME

Los Osos, Calif.

■ In his review of Christian Parenti's *The Freedom* and other books ["Because We Could," Nov. 8], Andrew Cockburn takes issue with Parenti's thesis that we went into Iraq to make "US military might...the sole security arbiter upon which all advanced economies are dependent" and that "securing the Middle East and its oil reserves would give America important political leverage over the EU and East Asia." Cockburn's preferred explanation: Dick Cheney wanted to keep his Halliburton pension rolling in. In view of the fact that since 1992 the Project for the New American Century—Donald Rumsfeld, Dick Cheney, James Woolsey, Paul Wolfowitz, Richard Perle, Bill Kristol, John Bolton, "Scooter" Libby, Zalmay Khalilzad, et al.—has advocated a military posture capable of, in their words, "deterring potential competitors from even aspiring to a larger regional or global role" and military intervention in Iraq to assure "access to vital raw material, primarily Persian Gulf oil" and that this doctrine, once its authors ascended to power, was codified into the National Security Strategy, yes, I think we can safely postulate at least this once, without Cockburn's fear of delving into "wonkery," that this nation acted "for reasons of foreign policy." He might best think of it as his own theory of all governments, international actions "motivated by exigencies of domestic politics and/or squalid personal greed" writ large. ANDREW CHRISTIE

WITH ENEMIES LIKE THIS...

Santa Barbara, Calif.

■ I thank Robert Baer for his review of my book, *The New Pearl Harbor* ["Dangerous Liaisons," Sept. 27], in which he, perhaps using methods learned in the CIA, cleverly supports the book's argument while appearing to dismiss it. First, he begins by declaring, "Conspiracy theories are hard to kill." He thereby pretends not to know that in the book's introduction, I pointed out that the question is not whether one accepts or rejects a conspiracy theory about 9/11 but only whether one accepts the government's conspiracy theory or some other one. By pretending not to know this, Baer suggests that to take issue with the book one needs only to put it in the "conspiracy theory" genre, thereby dismissing it a priori.

Second, he warns readers not to be fooled into thinking the book is "a search for truth," because my "mind is all but made up." By pretending to equate my state of mind before I began my research with my state of mind after I finished it, he appears to warn readers that I arrived at my views before examining the evidence. However, since he must know otherwise (assuming he read the introduction), he has simply helped the reader notice that it is his own approach that he has described. For he then says, "Griffin simply cannot accept that our national security system totally failed all on its own on September 11." So, although my book revolves around the choice between these two theories—official complicity or massive official incompetence—Baer announces that the latter is the truth, saying that the attacks succeeded because of "a confluence of incompetence, spurious assumptions and self-delusion on a grand scale," thereby suggesting that my book can be dismissed not by refuting its evidence but by dogmatically accepting the incompetence theory.

Third, Baer says that the incompetence theory is really implausible. After pointing to the failure of NORAD to protect us on 9/11, he asks: "Can it really be that incompetent?" He also shows that the claims of the FBI and CIA to have been "surprised by 9/11" are implausible.

Fourth, Baer uses strong words to denounce the book's ideas, calling them "wacky," "monstrous," and referring to one of my sources as a "crackpot author." This resort to name-calling is Baer's clearest signal that in his view the book's evidence cannot be challenged on its own terms.

Fifth, after pointing out that the Bush Administration used 9/11 as a pretext for the war in Iraq, he calls it a "senseless war." He thereby pretends not to be aware that the desire for a pretext to take over a country with the world's second-largest known oil reserves could have provided a powerful motive.

At this point, I must add that despite my admiration for Baer's subtle way of supporting my case for an investigation into the charge of official complicity, he misleads readers by suggesting that the case for the claim that the Bush Administration reaped foreseeable benefits from 9/11 rests entirely on this pretext for the attack on Iraq. I pointed out, however, that 9/11 was also a pretext to pass the Patriot Act, to attack Afghanistan (for oil, gas and bases) and to jack up military spending, especially for the US Space Command, with its goal of weaponizing space. But this is a minor flaw in an otherwise splendid review. DAVID RAY GRIFFIN

TIGRIS, TIGRIS, BURNING BRIGHT

Hamilton, NY

■ I was delighted to read Meline Toumani's affirmative opinion about my book *The Burning Tigris: The Armenian Genocide and America's Response* ["The Burden of Memory," Sept. 20], but I find her depiction of Armenian diasporan culture lacking in intellectual understanding and her assessment of the relationship between the Armenian genocide and Armenian diasporan culture shallow and morally skewed.

Toumani states that my book will become an "artifact in the fetish-culture of diasporan Armenians." But fetishizing commodities is different from fetishizing a scholarly book. To imply that a culture can fetishize the extermination of nearly 1.5 million people and the destruction of a homeland of 2,500 years is to trivialize genocide and distort the Marxian and anthropological notion of fetishism. Toumani also suggests that the Armenian-American quest for Armenian genocide recognition is the lifeblood of the Armenian diaspora, that it is a glorying in victimhood and that this victimhood is inauthentic because later generations of Armenians didn't really suffer.

Such a view lacks any understanding of the psychology of trauma and how grief and loss are transmitted across generations; the wounds of genocidal violence are passed down in deep and lasting ways, and for Armenians they are compounded by Turkey's continued denial of its crimes. She also discloses little understanding of the peculiar condition of Armenian genocide discourse. For more than half a century after the genocide, Armenians had no voice on the world stage. One of the worst human rights crimes in modern history had gone unpunished, unacknowledged and denied. When an Armenian genocide discourse finally emerged in the last quarter of the twentieth century, it came as a catharsis, a recovery of a buried history and a morally empowering responsibility. Diasporan Armenians could now begin to seek justice for their culture, honor the memory of their martyred forebears and take on a role of moral leadership in the international human rights community.

How would Toumani expect Native, African- or Jewish Americans to behave if the cultures that had exterminated them today denied their crimes and pursued a program of harassment, blame and racist demonization? Scholars have called the Turkish denial of the Armenian genocide singular. In such a morally berserk predicament, shouldn't Armenian-Americans and others respond with vigilance and an ethical pursuit of justice? Most Armenians in the diaspora seek first a fundamental climate of intellectual freedom where this history can be taught in the classroom and discussed in public without harassment by the Turkish government and community. After all, the Armenian genocide is a landmark history that inaugurated the modern era of genocide, was precursor to the Holocaust and helped give rise to Raphael Lemkin's invention of the concept of "genocide."

Last, Toumani treats Armenian-American culture as something inauthentic and devalues it with reductivism. Responding to Turkey's

(Continued on Page 59)

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EDITORIALS

Engaging Tehran

In a small victory for European diplomacy and constructive engagement, the International Atomic Energy Agency recently verified that Iran has suspended its uranium enrichment activities. It did so in accordance with an agreement reached with Britain, France and Germany (known as the EU3), which held out the prospect of expanded trade and investment in return for Iranian cooperation.

The Iranian–EU3 agreement has derailed for now an effort by the Bush Administration to isolate and sanction Iran for its alleged nuclear weapons activities. But the Administration has made clear that it is not about to join the European effort to engage Iran, and it issued a barrage of statements designed to discredit the agreement. The State Department claimed it had information that Iran was adapting missiles to carry nuclear warheads, and the White House pointed to reports that Iran had accelerated the production of uranium hexafluoride, a gas used in the production of nuclear weapons.

In putting out such statements—based in large part on unverified information from a single source whose reliability is questionable—the Administration shows that it either has no idea of its credibility problem or doesn't care. Worse, it seems determined to pursue a hard-line approach regardless of whether it has a chance of succeeding. The Administration does not have a viable military option against Iran, with US forces tied down in Iraq and with Iranian nuclear facilities dispersed to avoid preventive strikes.

Moreover, it surely knows that an effort to punish and isolate Iran is bound to fail without full cooperation from Europe, Russia and China, and it should know that such an effort is likely to accelerate whatever covert nuclear-weapons program Iran is pursuing in the hope of being able to deter future US intervention. Confronting Iran at this time does not make sense, given the overwhelming problems the Administration has created in the region. The United States needs Iran's continued cooperation in helping to stabilize both Afghanistan and Iraq, and in de-escalating the cycle of Israeli and Palestinian violence. For the most part, Iran has thus far been willing to oblige, by being supportive in Afghanistan and by encouraging moderation among the Shiites in Iraq. According to one report, it even offered to curb its backing for Hamas and Islamic Jihad in exchange for renewed US-Iranian relations.

Our European partners acknowledge that Iran may have long-term nuclear weapons ambitions. Indeed, it would be naïve to think otherwise, given Tehran's often-stated desire to be a stronger regional player and the fact that other countries in the region already have nuclear weapons, not to mention Iran's understandable fears of a US-dominated Iraq and the history of US and Iraqi aggression against it. But the EU3 are also right to believe that diplomacy is the only way to avoid a destabilizing nuclear breakout that would foreclose a more stable, nonnuclear regional order in the long term.

The EU3-Iranian agreement buys time for further constructive diplomacy—time to maintain some international oversight, through the IAEA, of Iran's nuclear program and to test Iran's interest in further moderating its behavior as well as in helping shape a regional order based on principles of common security. Wash-

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COMMENT

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ington has nothing to lose and much to gain by being supportive of European diplomacy and by opening up its own avenues of communication with Iran—in order to gain more information about Iran's weapons program, its internal politics and how domestic forces see its future role in the region.

Ultimately the problem of Iran's nuclear ambitions can be solved only by offering the outlines of a larger regional bargain. That bargain would make Iran a partner in stabilizing and modernizing the Middle East and it would put all the weapons systems in the region on the table, including Israel's and America's. The Administration's track record of unilateralism alternating with threats and confrontation does not bode well for the future of such a bargain. But it is really the diplomatic goal best worth pursuing, and the European approach is an essential first step on the way.

COMMENT

Destabilizing the CIA

In Washington, it's hardly without precedent for a presidential appointee to swear one thing before a Senate confirmation committee and then, once ensconced in the sought-after post, do another. But even by this standard, George W. Bush's new Director of Central Intelligence, Porter Goss, has been particularly brazen. Appearing before the Senate Intelligence Committee on September 14, Goss—until recently, a Florida Congressman and chair of the House Intelligence Committee—not only swore to "commit myself to a nonpartisan approach to the job of DCI"; he even went so far as to state that "it would be entirely inappropriate to make anything that looks like a partisan comment."

On November 15, however, the newly appointed DCI told CIA employees in a memo that "we support the Administration and its policies in our work…we do not identify with, support or champion opposition to the Administration or its policies." One of the most insightful analyses of the memo came from Jon Stewart's *Daily Show*; correspondent Rob Corddry explained it as reflective of the Administration's desire to deal only "with intelligence that's been vetted to support decisions they've already made. They're tired of having to repeatedly misinterpret information the CIA gives them, so from now on intelligence will arrive at the White House pre-misinterpreted." In addition to heralding a likely continuation of the intelligence "stovepiping" process that reformers agree has to change, Goss's memo was a stunning and unparalleled articulation of CIA fealty to the White House. It was also tantamount to a declaration of war by Goss and his Capitol Hill cronies against career civil servants—and necessary intelligence reform—that shows a remarkable lack of judgment and competence.

While external political pressures have marginalized the agency's effectiveness, it also has a host of systemic problems that have nothing to do with politics. When Goss was nominated, some hoped that as a former CIA officer and Congressional overseer of the agency, he would be a statesmanlike reformer and would staff the CIA accordingly, perhaps going so far as to re-

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call to duty some of the agency's more respected hands. Not only has Goss declined the offer of a simple meeting with former deputy directors of operations (the chief spy-runners) seeking to offer counsel, but the Hill aides he's brought with him to Langley are described by one venerated CIA officer as "the typical staffer—guys who used to work in the agency but fucked up or were too political to be effective."

Joseph "Jay" Jakub, whose eight years of CIA experience as an analyst ended in the mid-1990s, has spent much of the past decade working for Goss or the rabidly partisan Representative Dan Burton; despite a lack of actual spy-running experience, he now occupies the Goss-created slot of "special assistant for operations and analysis." Patrick Murray, John Ashcroft's former associate deputy attorney general for national security and Goss's chief of staff at the House Intelligence Committee and now at Langley, has, in the view of many, proved he has no business being there. Angered about the revelations that derailed one early high-level appointment (that of Michael Kostiw, who was forced out of the agency twenty-two years ago after a shoplifting incident), Murray told the agency's counterintelligence chief that she would be held responsible for any further personnel-related leaks.

"This really shows you how paranoid, and how poor, Murray and these guys' thinking skills are—the Kostiw flap was in 1982, and there really isn't anyone left at Langley who goes back that far," says a retired officer. "In all likelihood the Kostiw information came from a retiree. And even if it didn't, fashionable as 'pre-emption' is with this set, there's only so much you can do to stop someone from dropping a dime before they do it." The counterintelligence chief's boss, associate deputy director for operations Michael Sulick, upbraided Murray for his bullying; when Goss backed Murray and ordered deputy director of operations Stephen Kappes to reassign Sulick, both Kappes and Sulick resigned, thus depriving the Directorate of Operations, or DO, of two of its most experienced and respected hands.

While Goss has replaced Kappes and Sulick with bona fide CIA employees, a survey of former and current case officers doesn't yield much enthusiasm for his choices—named here for the first time. José Rodriguez, the new deputy director of operations, gets reasonably good marks for his recent stint as director of the Counterterrorist Center, but some are still bothered by a 1997 incident in which he tried to help an old friend out of a drug-related arrest in Latin America; others think that Rodriguez's experience base is lacking, given the Latin American division's historical lower-on-the-totem-pole status within the agency. Some hold that Rodriguez and the agency will be well-served by his new deputy, Mike Mears, because of Mears's service in a variety of agency positions, but several veteran case officers referred to Mears as "a disaster," citing his role in two failed field operations in the past (the officers declined to give details).

The critical position of executive director—the person responsible for actually running the CIA day to day—is now going to a twenty-two-year agency veteran, but knowledgeable observers are less than optimistic about how the nominee, K. Dusty Foggo, will do, particularly with regard to fixing the agency's very broken support functions. While Foggo has had ample field experience—his last overseas assignment was running the agency's Germany-based forward logistics facility—his lack of senior headquarters-level posts may be inadequate preparation to run a 33,000-strong agency. "He hasn't had a lot of give and take with the division chiefs or deputy directors, as well as equivalents at other agencies or on the Hill—at best, he's not ready," says one veteran. Some also note memorable overseas clashes between Foggo and DO officers and State Department personnel.

According to several retired officers, the muscle-flexing of the Gosstroopers is coming at great peril not only to intelligence professionalism and national security but to themselves. "From here on out, elements of the DO especially will effectively slow or close down; directives will be ignored or carried out at a leisurely pace," says one decorated former case officer. "Goss's people will find themselves isolated. If they fire or reassign certain people, all they'll do is create wider gaps in already lacking institutional knowledge and competence, and however much backing Goss has from the President, that will not sit well even with Republicans in Congress. But the damage has already been done." Or, as former deputy director of operations Thomas Twetten put it in a November 23 *Los Angeles Times* op-ed, "I am not sure that the current DCI can recover from the wrong foot his partisan staff has put him on."

JASON VEST

Jason Vest writes on national security affairs for The Nation.

Falluja's Health Damage

While the North American news media have focused on the military triumph of US Marines in Falluja, little attention has been paid to reports that US armed forces killed scores of patients in an attack on a Falluja health center and have deprived civilians of medical care, food and water.

Although the US military has dismissed accounts of the health center bombing as "unsubstantiated," in fact they are credible and come from multiple sources. Dr. Sami al-Jumaili described how US warplanes bombed the Central Health Centre in which he was working at 5:30 AM on November 9. The clinic had been treating many of the city's sick and wounded after US forces took over the main hospital at the start of the invasion. According to Dr. al-Jumaili, US warplanes dropped three bombs on the clinic, where approximately sixty patients—many of whom had serious injuries from US aerial bombings and attacks—were being treated.

Dr. al-Jumaili reports that thirty-five patients were killed in the airstrike, including two girls and three boys under the age of 10. In addition, he said, fifteen medics, four nurses and five health support staff were killed, among them health aides Sami Omar and Omar Mahmoud, nurses Ali Amini and Omar Ahmed, and physicians Muhammad Abbas, Hamid Rabia, Saluan al-Kubaissy and Mustafa Sheriff.

Although the deaths of these individual health workers could not be independently confirmed, Dr. al-Jumaili's account is echoed by Fadhil Badrani, an Iraqi reporter for Reuters and the BBC. Reached by phone in Falluja, Badrani estimated that forty patients and fifteen health workers had been killed in the bombing. Dr. Eiman al-Ani of Falluja General Hospital, who said he

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COMMENT

reached the site shortly after the attack, said that the entire health center had collapsed on the patients.

It was well-known that the Falluja facility was a health center operating as a small hospital, a protected institution under international law. According to James Ross of Human Rights Watch, "the onus would be on the US government to demonstrate that the hospital was being used for military purposes and that its response was proportionate. Even if there were snipers there, it would never justify destroying a hospital."

US airstrikes also leveled a warehouse in which medical supplies were stored next to the health center, Dr. al-Jumaili reports. Ambulances from the city had been confiscated by the government, he says, and the only vehicle left was targeted by US fire, killing the driver and wounding a paramedic. Hamid Salaman of the Falluja General Hospital told the Associated Press that five patients in the ambulance were killed.

US and allied Iraqi military forces stormed the Falluja General Hospital, which is on the perimeter of the city, at the beginning of the assault, claiming it was under insurgent control and was a center of propaganda about civilian casualties during last April's attack on the city. The soldiers encountered no resistance. Dr. Rafe Chiad, the hospital's director, reached by phone, stated emphatically that it is a neutral institution, providing humanitarian aid. According to Dr. Chiad, the US military has prevented hospital physicians, including a team of surgeons, anesthesiologists, internists and general practitioners, from entering Falluja. US authorities have denied all requests to send doctors, ambulances, medical equipment and supplies from the hospital into the city to tend to the wounded, he said. Now the city's only health facility is a small Iraqi military clinic, which is inaccessible to most of the city's remaining population because of its distance from many neighborhoods and the dangers posed by US snipers and crossfire.

"Falluja is dying," said Dr. al-Ani. "We want to save whoever we can." Jim Welsh, health and human rights coordinator for Amnesty International in London, notes that under the Geneva Conventions, "medical personnel cannot be forced to refrain from providing healthcare which they believe is their ethical responsibility." The 173-bed Falluja General Hospital remains empty, according to Dr. Chiad.

The Iraqi Red Crescent Society has called the health conditions in and around Falluja "catastrophic." One hospital staff member who recently left the city reports that there were severe outbreaks of diarrheal infections among the population, with children and the elderly dying from infectious disease, starvation and dehydration in greater numbers each day. Dr. al-Jumaili, Dr. al-Ani and journalist Badrani each stated that the wounded and children are dying because of lack of medical attention and water. In one case, according to Dr. al-Jumaili, three children died of dehydration when their father was unable to find water for them. The US forces cut off the city's water supply before launching their assault.

"The people are dying because they are injured, have nothing to eat or drink, almost no healthcare," said Dr. al-Ani. "The small rations of food and water handed out by the US soldiers cannot provide for the population." For the thousands living in makeshift camps outside the city, according to Firdus al-Ubadi of the Red Crescent Society, hygiene and health conditions are as precarious as in Falluja. There are no oral rehydration solutions or salts for those who are dehydrated, she says.

These reports demand an immediate international response, an end to assaults on Falluja's civilian population and the free passage of medical aid, food and water. Louise Arbour, the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, has vowed to investigate "violations of the rules of war designed to protect civilians and combatants" in Falluja and to bring the perpetrators to justice. The San Francisco–based Association of Humanitarian Lawyers has petitioned the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights of the Organization of American States to investigate the deaths. The bombing of hospitalized patients, forced starvation and dehydration, denial of medicines and health services to the sick and wounded must be recognized for what they are: war crimes and crimes against humanity. MILES SCHUMAN

Miles Schuman is a family physician and member of the medical network of the Canadian Centre for Victims of Torture. Afif Sarhan, an Iraqi physician and journalist, contributed reporting for this article.

CALVIN TRILLIN

FAREWELL, COLIN POWELL

We need to say farewell to Colin Powell,
Who should have long ago tossed in the towel.
Instead he lent his good name to the team
In vouching for its cockamamie scheme.
And now the team has shoved him out the door—
Not needed anymore (they got their war).
He's let himself be used by lesser men.
It's sad to see, as we remember when
Some thought he was the President-elect to be,
How easily is done a Colinectomy.

Blue State Secession

In the shadow of the election that returned to power the most autocratic and illegitimate government the nation has ever experienced, many are beginning to talk about "blue state" secession. Most of the talk has seemed frivolous, but over the weekend of November 5–7 in Middlebury, Vermont, three dozen people met to discuss and promote—seriously—the prospect of secession from the United States.

The three days of speeches, presentations and debate were sponsored by the Fourth World, an organization based in England devoted to the separatist movements working for independence within the other three "worlds," and by the Second Vermont Re-

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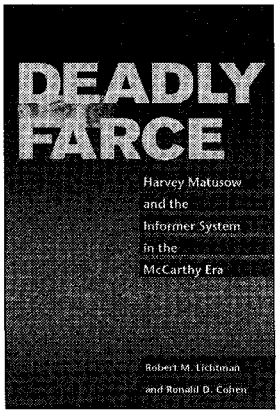

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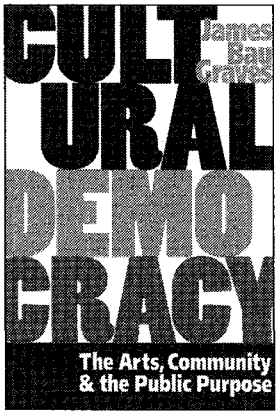

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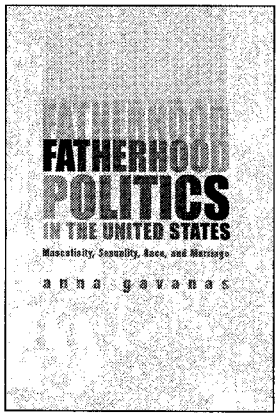

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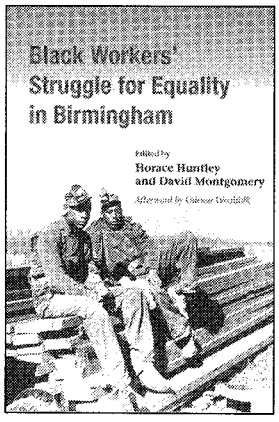

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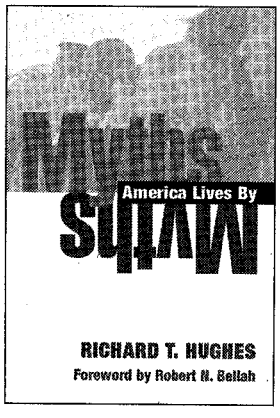

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COMMENT

public, a grassroots movement that is ardently working for the state to become a republic, as it was from 1777 to 1791 (www.vermontrepublic.org). It is safe to say that not many people knew such organizations even existed, but the passion and earnestness of the weekend's deliberations showed there is a real feeling that consideration of such an extreme measure as secession is not beyond the pale.

"I think November 7 was a watershed occasion," said Thomas Naylor, a retired Duke University economics professor who has lived in Vermont for a decade and is the founder of the Second Vermont Republic. "We've put the idea of secession into the public arena and found it has a lot of resonance." Indeed, the local *Rutland Herald* gave the conference a prominent fourteen-paragraph story ("Secession enthusiasts meet in Middlebury"). The leading French daily in Quebec did a front-page story on the meeting (naturally, it liked the idea).

The pattern of the meeting, billed as a "Radical Consultation," was to consider the options open to people wanting to challenge and change the current American empire and to test the viability of what might be put in its place, especially if, as the call for the conference argued, "it has most probably become unsustainable economically, politically, militarily, agriculturally, socially, culturally, and environmentally." Among the options considered and rejected were denial, compliance, reform and revolution, leaving the discussion to concentrate on decentralization, separatism and secession.

A statement signed by most of the participants gives a sense of where that discussion led: "In our deliberations we have considered many kinds of strategies for a new politics and eventually decided upon the inauguration of a campaign to monitor, study, promote and develop agencies of separatism," meaning "all the forms by which small political bodies distance themselves from larger ones...creating small and independent states that rule themselves."

The statement went on to argue that "there is no reason that we cannot begin to examine the process of secession in the United States." It cited twenty-eight separatist organizations already operating in this country, including those in Alaska, Hawaii, Texas and Puerto Rico, in addition to Vermont. "The principle of secession," it said, "must be established as valid and legitimate."

The model of secession put forth by the Second Republic people was specifically endorsed by the meeting. That group has been working for a year and a half and has issued a Vermont constitution, a bill of rights and a 128-page manifesto arguing that secession is in fact legal under the US Constitution and that "all American states have a moral and legal right to leave the Union." They believe that "a peaceful, democratic, grassroots, libertarian populist" approach can indeed make great inroads.

The conference also specifically endorsed an effort to establish a think tank to examine issues of sovereignty, independ-

In Fact . . .

REPUBLICAN BLOOD SPORTS

■ In the pregame highlights for the next two years of GOP one-party rule, right-wing radicals dropped their towels and exposed themselves in all their naked ambition recently. It wasn't a pretty sight. Tom DeLay's buddies voted to lower their party's ethical standards to protect their leader over the objection of moderates like Christopher Shays, who expects to be punished. Maybe DeLay will end up doing the time (artist's rendering, below):

More funny games! Arlen Specter, pinned by the religious right, cried uncle and signed a White House loyalty oath, a humiliation unprecedented in our constitutional system of checks and balances. Two Congressional staffers snuck a provision into the omnibus spending bill giving Congress the right to examine every American's tax returns. Senator Ted Stevens, Republican from Alaska, had to apologize to his colleagues. And in a Pacers-Pistons–like brawl in the House, Defense Department patsies kayoed the Intelligence Reform Bill, much to the shock and awe of Senate Republican supporters like Pat Roberts and Susan Collins. It would seem the only thing punier than being a Democrat these days is being a moderate Republican. How long will they stand the humiliations, the bullying, the powerlessness before they defect like Jim Jeffords? Maybe executive producer Karl Rove's TV hit, *The Permanent Republican Majority*, will be canceled sooner than anyone suspected.

THIS WEEK ON THE WEB

■ James K. Galbraith says that the remedy for voter fraud is simple: Abolish election day and have America start voting by mail, which is how the state of Oregon does things. As Galbraith writes, "In Oregon, there are no election day problems, because there is no election day." Read about his proposal at www.thenation.com.

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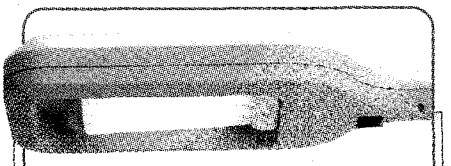

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ence and secession, and to create a journal that would explore popular and scholarly approaches to this area.

In a dark time of rampant "political capital" Bushism there are still people willing to shine a different light, and in that context the idea of separatism and secessionism might have a real attraction to disaffected Americans. KIRKPATRICK SALE

Kirkpatrick Sale, patron of the Fourth World (4thworld.co.uk), is the author of, among others, Human Scale *and* The Conquest of Paradise.

Sex & the Clergy

Exit poll results indicating that 22 percent of voters ranked moral values as the most important factor in their support for a presidential candidate have occupied more than their fair share of media attention. While the religious right has seized on the results as a vindication of their opposition to gay marriage and abortion rights, the religious left has stumbled in its attempts to respond. Its unwillingness to deal with gender, sex and reproduction is its Achilles' heel.

Part of the problem is that women are virtually absent from the leadership ranks of the progressive religious movements. These movements are run, for the most part, by men of good will who have eloquently opposed the war in Iraq, tax cuts and the lack of adequate healthcare. But they don't understand the role that women and sex play in the modern world. Social conservatives have built their movement on hostility to women and women's rights; they have brilliantly played on the fear that both men and women feel in the face of the demand that they be equal partners in faith and family. Many progressive religionists think they can build a movement of people of faith that ignores those issues and concentrates on the 1960s agenda of antimilitarism and the eradication of poverty. They seem annoyed that issues like abortion rights, teen sexuality, gay marriage, stem-cell research and shared power between men and women take up so much space—space they are excluded from because they will not take straightforward, honest positions on these issues.

In the case of abortion, schizophrenia abounds: First Jim Wallis, the moderate evangelical preacher who speaks frequently on behalf of religious progressives, tells us we shouldn't focus on this issue at all; then he expounds on what the Democrats should do to attract "'centrist' Catholic and evangelical voters." Wallis says the Democrats should "welcome pro-life Democrats—Catholics and evangelicals—and have a serious conversation with them" about how to reduce teen pregnancy, make adoption easier and conditions for low-income women better. It is odd for a progressive religious leader to suggest that Democrats, rather than Republicans, are the obstacle to helping teens and low-income women but perhaps not surprising from a man whose personal commitment to dialogue has included demonstrating at a nuclear plant and an abortion clinic on the same day.

Wallis is the most visible antiabortion cleric in the progressive movement, but even those who are personally pro-choice won't touch the issue. The Rev. Bob Edgar, a pro-choice former member of Congress who now heads the National Council of Churches, has been active in a number of the new groups that are promoting a progressive religious agenda excluding women's equality and reproductive rights. That's because some of the council's members hold different opinions on these issues, and it does not want to offend the Catholic Church. For the same reason, the oldest of the religious left groups, the Interfaith Alliance, refuses to take a position on controversial social issues, opting for a vague commitment to "tolerance."

Such evasiveness not only works to the advantage of religious conservatives but hampers attempts to articulate a coherent religious left agenda. After all, these issues, especially international access to safe and legal abortion and recognition of the civil rights of gay couples, are as important to a comprehensive vision of a just society as is the eradication of poverty and the creation of a secure and peaceful world.

World leaders recognize this. Kofi Annan has acknowledged that without sexual and reproductive health and gender equality, poverty will not be eradicated. Perhaps part of the reason so many progressive religious leaders don't get it is that so few of them have any track record within their own denominations of working for women's or gay rights. How can we expect these men to speak out in civil society for causes they have not supported in their own denominations?

So what's a feminist of faith to do? A small number of progressive religious women agree with their male bosses and are content. Mara Vanderslice, for example, went from a staff job working for Jim Wallis to become the religious point person for Kerry. Kate Michelman, former president of NARAL, recalls how Vanderslice cornered her at the Democratic convention and sought her help in convincing Catholics that Kerry was really against abortion. Others have followed the time-honored path of faithful accompaniment. They join the groups and try to gently prod the men, but in the interest of a partial but important justice agenda, they go along. And still others, particularly feminist clergy and theologians, have shunned the discriminatory world of religion, including progressive religion, to work in secular organizations for a social justice agenda that includes women's and gay rights.

But few have directly confronted the problems of gender inequality and lack of vision that plague progressive religious politics; few have gone so far as to say that a progressive religious agenda for justice that fails to recognize the moral agency of men and women to make decisions about family planning, abortion and marriage partners is unacceptable. This is finally beginning to change. The feminist theologian Rita Nakashima Brock is an emerging voice for religious feminism and an effective advocate for a women-centered progressive agenda. More should follow her example. It is bad enough that so many male progressive clergy continue to put every interest above justice for women within the churches, synagogues and mosques they rule. The possibility that they might be able to expand the influence of their patriarchal mindset within the Democratic Party is unthinkable.

FRANCES KISSLING

Frances Kissling is the president of Catholics for a Free Choice (www.catholicsforchoice.org).

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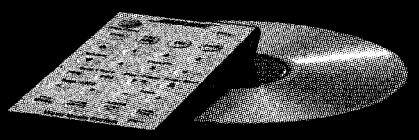

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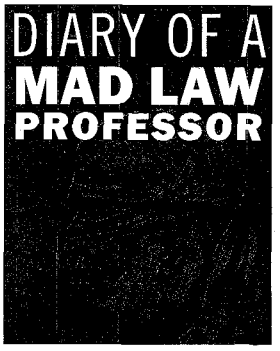
PATRICIA J. WILLIAMS

From Birmingham to Baghdad



I, Condoleezza Rice, was leaning over the kitchen sink, hacking up a half-dozen or so rotisserie chickens and slinging the parts into a serving dish in time for the first of the party guests. I filled the bowls with popcorn and peanuts, brewed a pot of French roast and pulled a lost toddler out of the laundry room. I sidled up to Arnold Schwarzenegger and gave him a big old smooch. And when the Devil walked in the door, he took one look at me and said, "You win."

Yes, it was Halloween night and I, Patricia J. Williams, had gotten myself up in the guise of the soon-to-be Secretary of State of the United States of America. I had it down, from the proper little suit to the neatly tucked bob of a hairdo. And it was funny for a while—vampires deflected, ghouls leapt back. After a time, I took the mask off, but people still called me Condoleezza for the rest of the evening. And that felt strange and sad somehow.

That woman haunts most of us middle-class black women of a certain age. All those gold stars from the time she was 3, the churchy good-girlness, those closely guarded borders. A couple of years ago, Nicholas Lemann did a piece in *The New Yorker* in which he said that she had a very unusual upbringing in that she was so intensely tutored—the ice-skating instruction, the piano lessons, the French classes. But life in the black middle class was often exhaustingly monitored for nice girls raised in the we-shall-overcome integrationist post-*Brown* era. It was punishing sometimes, with its emphasis on always being on display, always having to be "twice as good as," always bearing the banner for the generations before. From Ruby Bridges to Charlayne Hunter-Gault, from Barbara Lee to Anita Hill—Condoleezza Rice and her hyper-articulated intelligence is just under the surface of us all, the differences made all the more uncomfortable for the similarities. We were all paralyzed by the bombings in Birmingham.

The day after Rice was nominated, I listened to gleeful talk-radio hosts set out the right wing's new terms of debate about her. It was something on the order of: So who's a racist now, scumbags? We're the ones who love her. Liberals hate her. And you affirmatively active black people must be choking on a bone.

They're wrong. Nobody "hates" Condoleezza Rice. If she's not exactly liked it's because her beliefs are at odds with approximately 92 percent of African-Americans, whose commitment to the progressive programs of the civil rights movement runs strong and deep. It is odd for many of us to see Bush touting her as embodying that precious tradition of nonviolent resistance, that liberation theology so dedicated to honoring the memory of four young girls killed as they worshiped. If it's nice to see a black face in high places, that pleasure is more than outweighed by Rice's deployment as spokeswoman for an unprecedented policy of preemptive war—the public face of an undisciplined, frightened, chaotically mismanaged yet supposedly liberatory force that thoughtlessly bombs mosques with unarmed civilians inside.

It is true that the far right seems to love her. When I listened to Sean Hannity's show, members of his largely white male audience were phoning in to say that they wanted to marry her, that she was just the smartest little girl they'd ever seen. Then they'd laugh and laugh and laugh. "I just love her to death!" cackled one caller.

This unusual affection is apparently mutual. The day after her elevation was announced, the front page of the *New York Times* carried a photo of Rice gazing adoringly at Bush. It was quite a kittenish pose; she looked so young and coy one was compelled to imagine that her toes were pointed inward, like Minnie Mouse. All that was missing was a big bow in her hair. Indeed, no one seemed to know what to make of that conspicuously odd goof, when she said, "My husb——I mean the President." There was genuine pathos in the moment, like she'd been drawing little hearts in her notebook, the silly thing, dreaming of the day she could grow up and marry her homeroom teacher. Or maybe she was more like the smartest kid in the class who slips the captain of the football team the answers to the test because it's her only route to recognition if not popularity. He's still going to marry the cheerleader; but she'll be shielded from the torment of loneliness that can sometimes follow the bookish and the brightest.

Let me make a leap here, and bring in the name of John Danforth, ambassador to the United Nations, but possible nominee to the Supreme Court. I've been rereading his book, *Resurrection*—the one in which he and Clarence Thomas hold hands and listen to "Onward Christian Soldiers" in the Senate bathroom, and the one that ends with these words: "Clarence had risen. Alleluia!" This would also be the book that hovers lovingly over various descriptions of Anita Hill as "aggressive," "ideological," "argumentative," "outspoken" and too ardently "pro-woman."

Condoleezza Rice is supposedly none of those things; and yet she is all those things: She's hard as nails, mind like a steel trap, ideological as all get-out. But her self-presentation belies the degree to which she is ideological—rather, she comes across as obedient, dutiful, understated, an anchor in the storm. I can't help thinking that to be her, one would have to live in fear of what would happen if you veered from the path of conformity. Would people get angry at you and speculate about you and Coke cans? Or whether you fit the clinical definition of an erotomaniac?

Certainly no one speculates about whether Condoleezza Rice has erotomania. She is so firmly straitlaced that she's never had a boyfriend or a romantic relationship that anyone knows about. Perhaps that's just because she's actually managed to create a zone of privacy around herself; if so, more power to her. But from a certain perspective, she seems also to embody a more contradictory legacy of Birmingham than any of us would like to admit: She embodies a "safe" but weirdly racialized prurient prudishness. She is a little girl who is older and wiser than she should be, yet a middle-aged woman who acts younger and more flirtatious than she should. She is a tightly fitted mask of compulsive politeness pulled over both great grief and corrosive, unhealed cruelties. ■

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ERIC ALTERMAN

Money for Nothing

To hear conservatives describe it, the only video appearances that hurt John Kerry more than that of Osama bin Laden were those of Hollywood celebrities, who united behind his candidacy as never before. As Andrew Sullivan describes it, "the Hollywood Left" lost the election for John Kerry (at least when he's not insisting that the fault somehow lies with Noam Chomsky). This kind of vituperation has a strong pedigree among right-wing demagogues. L. Brent Bozell complains that Hollywood is filled with "political dilettantes...leftist celebrities" who are "America-haters." Dorothy Rabinowitz terms the world of Hollywood political liberalism to be one of "elitist scum" who "live in...an alternate revolting universe." Bill O'Reilly went her one better, comparing Bush-fighting Hollywood activists' access to the "profitable and pervasive" "celebrity media" to that of a "Leni Riefenstahl Third Reich propaganda proposition, where what they say and do is put in everybody's face."

The mainstream media accept much of this critique. The constant refrain that Hollywood is "out of touch" and filled with "political dilettantes" is offered as evidence of the illegitimacy of Hollywood's political participation in a way one never hears about, say, Wall Street, Grosse Pointe or even Silicon Valley. Almost uniquely among the tiny percentage of Americans who do contribute large amounts of money to political campaigns—the number who give a thousand dollars or more to any candidate hovers around one tenth of 1 percent of the population, according to Public Campaign's Micah Sifry—Hollywood's contributions do not buy the giver anything concrete like a tax break or a regulation relaxation. While the entertainment industry does have corporate PACs, who do the business's bidding and spread their wealth accordingly, most of the money handed out by the entertainment industry is ideological money and buys its giver nothing.

In reporting on the power of political contributions before the election, *Business Week*, for instance, explained that Hollywood environmental activist Laurie David was seeking "tougher anti-pollution laws if Kerry wins in November" while Wall Street would be "lobby[ing] for new retirement savings plans if Bush triumphs." The article concluded: "In any case, the special interests can be expected to call in their chits one way or the other." Excuse me, but how is it that the term "special interest" came to be applied without distinction to both a lobbyist seeking to improve the quality of air and water for an entire planet and wealthy firms seeking a government retirement plan designed to line their own pockets? As David fairly complains, it is ridiculous to compare "a corporate CEO trying to evade paying for pollution controls with someone raising money to hope for an administration that will try and keep mercury out of the air so small children don't get brain damage."

While there are undoubtedly social and professional benefits in Hollywood that derive from giving money to liberal causes, rich liberals get nothing from the national treasury or tax code for their activism. A March 2004 report by Public Citizen found that of the 416 Bush campaign "Rangers" and "Pioneers"—donors who had raised $200,000 and $100,000 respectively—90 percent represented the special interests of America's most powerful corporations. The top six, CEOs all, enjoyed an average bonus of $270,000 each last year, merely on the basis of their personal tax reductions, according to analysis by Campaign Money Watch.

Paul Begala recalls that during all his time in the White House, meeting with hundreds if not thousands of powerful contributors, "Ninety-nine point five percent of them were asking me for something designed to put money in their own pockets. Hollywood people were the only big givers who never asked for anything but that we try to make America a better country as they saw it." Indeed, billionaire entertainment mogul David Geffen raised in the neighborhood of $20 million for the President and his party during the Clinton years, perhaps as much as anyone in the United States. He threw large fundraisers at his house and small, billionaire-only dinner parties, where he would provide entrée to Clinton for various entertainment moguls and then hit them up for contributions. According to biographer Tom King, two such dinners totaling just twenty-four guests raised a total of $2 million. But instead of seeking special favors from the President, they actually lobbied him not to give them any. There was one night at Geffen's Malibu beach house, one knowledgeable source informs me, when Geffen brought nine or ten of these guys together and told the President not to cut the capital gains tax. "We've already got enough. We don't need this, too." Clinton gave it to them anyway.

Of course, Hollywood celebrities bear some of the responsibility for their bad press. While many Hollywood personalities are dead serious about their politics and contribute their money and celebrity intelligently and strategically, more than a few really are just as spoiled media-wise as they are life-wise, expecting the same supplication from reporters as from their personal publicists, agents, managers, masseuses, life coaches, gardeners, pool attendants and pedicurists. But media *machers* would have a far stronger case for complaint about the role Hollywood plays in our politics if the very same media outlets weren't begging for each star's latest pronouncement. As the Irish actor Daniel Day-Lewis notes, "The media are sick and tired of people in my profession giving their opinion, and yet you're asking me my opinion. And when I give it, you'll say, 'Why doesn't he shut up?'" Norman Lear, founder of People for the American Way and funder of countless liberal causes and candidates, grows furious in describing the hypocrisy of the media he finds himself forced to exploit to win coverage of crucial issues with celebrity appearances: "*Us*, *People*, *E*, *Inside Story* didn't come from the grassroots. Establishment America has seen to it that young nubile women can sell everything from dental floss, to a car, to a condom.... We make this culture to mock it." ■

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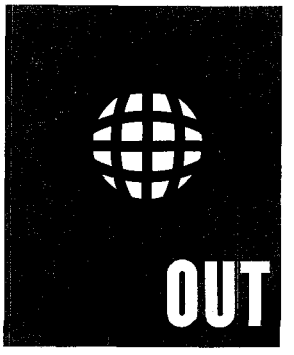
NAOMI KLEIN

Kerry and the Gift of Impunity

Iconic images inspire love and hate, and so it is with the photograph of James Blake Miller, the 20-year-old Marine from Appalachia who has been christened "the face of Falluja" by prowar pundits and "The Marlboro Man" by pretty much everyone else. Reprinted in more than a hundred newspapers, the *Los Angeles Times* photograph shows Miller "after more than twelve hours of nearly nonstop deadly combat" in Falluja, his face coated in war paint, a bloody scratch on his nose, and a freshly lit cigarette hanging from his lips.



Gazing lovingly at Miller, Dan Rather confessed that, "for me, this is personal.... This is a warrior with his eyes on the far horizon, scanning for danger. See it, study it, absorb it. Think about it. Then take a deep breath of pride. And if your eyes don't dampen, you're a better man or woman than I." A few days later, the *LA Times* declared that its photo had "moved into the realm of the iconic." In truth, the image just feels iconic because it is so laughably derivative: It's a straight-up rip-off of the most powerful icon in American advertising (the Marlboro Man), which in turn imitated the brightest star ever created by Hollywood (John Wayne) who was himself channeling America's most powerful founding myth (the cowboy on the rugged frontier). It's like a song you feel like you've heard a thousand times before—because you have.

But never mind that. For a country that just elected a wannabe Marlboro Man as its President, Miller is an icon, and as if to prove it he has ignited his very own controversy. "Lots of children, particularly boys, play 'army' and like to imitate this young man. The clear message of the photo is that the way to relax after a battle is with a cigarette," wrote Daniel Maloney in a scolding letter to the *Houston Chronicle*. Linda Ortman made the same point to the editors of the *Dallas Morning News*: "Are there no photos of nonsmoking soldiers in Iraq?" A reader of the *New York Post* suggested more politically correct propaganda imagery: "Maybe showing a Marine in a tank, helping another GI or drinking water, would have a more positive impact on your readers."

Yes, that's right: Letter-writers from across the nation are united in their outrage—not that the steely-eyed smoking soldier makes mass killing look cool but that the laudable act of mass killing makes the grave crime of smoking look cool. It reminds me of the joke about the Hasidic rabbi who says all sexual positions are acceptable except for one: standing up, "because that could lead to dancing."

On second thought, perhaps Miller does deserve to be elevated to the status of icon—not of the war in Iraq but of the new era of supercharged American impunity. Because outside US borders, it is, of course, a different Marine who has been awarded the prize as "the face of Falluja": the soldier captured on tape executing a wounded, unarmed prisoner in a mosque. Runners-up are a photograph of 2-year-old Fallujan in a hospital bed with one of his tiny legs blown off; a dead child lying in the street, clutching the headless body of an adult; and an emergency health clinic blasted to rubble. Inside the United States, these snapshots of a lawless occupation appeared only briefly, if at all. Yet Miller's icon status has endured, kept alive with human interest stories about fans sending cartons of Marlboros to Falluja, interviews with the Marine's proud mother and earnest discussions about whether smoking might reduce Miller's effectiveness as a fighting machine.

Impunity—the perception of being outside the law—has long been the hallmark of the Bush regime. What is alarming is that it appears to have deepened since the election, ushering in what can best be described as an orgy of impunity. In Iraq, US forces and their Iraqi surrogates are assaulting civilian targets and openly attacking doctors, clerics and journalists who have dared to count the bodies. At home, impunity has been made official policy with Bush's nomination of Alberto Gonzales—the man who personally advised the President in his infamous "torture memo" that the Geneva Conventions are "obsolete"—as Attorney General.

This kind of defiance cannot simply be explained by Bush's win. There has to be something in how he won, in how the election was fought, that gave this Administration the distinct impression that it had been handed a "get out of the Geneva Conventions free" card. That's because the Administration was handed precisely such a gift—by John Kerry.

In the name of "electability," the Kerry campaign gave Bush five months on the campaign trail without ever facing serious questions about violations of international law. Fearing he would be seen as soft on terror and disloyal to US troops, Kerry stayed scandalously silent about Abu Ghraib and Guantánamo Bay. When it became clear that fury would rain down on Falluja as soon as the polls closed, Kerry never spoke out against the plan, or against the illegal bombings of civilian areas that took place throughout the campaign. Even after *The Lancet* published its landmark study estimating that 100,000 Iraqis had died as a result of the invasion and occupation, Kerry repeated his outrageous (and frankly racist) claim that Americans "have borne 90 percent of the casualties in Iraq." His unmistakable message: Iraqi deaths don't count. By buying the highly questionable logic that Americans are incapable of caring about anyone's lives but their own, the Kerry campaign and its supporters became complicit in the dehumanization of Iraqis, reinforcing the idea that some lives are insufficiently important to risk losing votes over. And it is this morally bankrupt logic, more than the election of any single candidate, that allows these crimes to continue unchecked.

The real-world result of all the "strategic" thinking is the worst of both worlds: It didn't get Kerry elected and it sent a clear message to the people who were elected that they will pay no political price for committing war crimes. And this is Kerry's true gift to Bush: not just the presidency, but impunity. You can see it perhaps best of all in the Marlboro Man in Falluja, and the surreal debates that swirl around him. Genuine impunity breeds a kind of delusional decadence, and this is its face: a nation bickering about smoking while Iraq burns. ■

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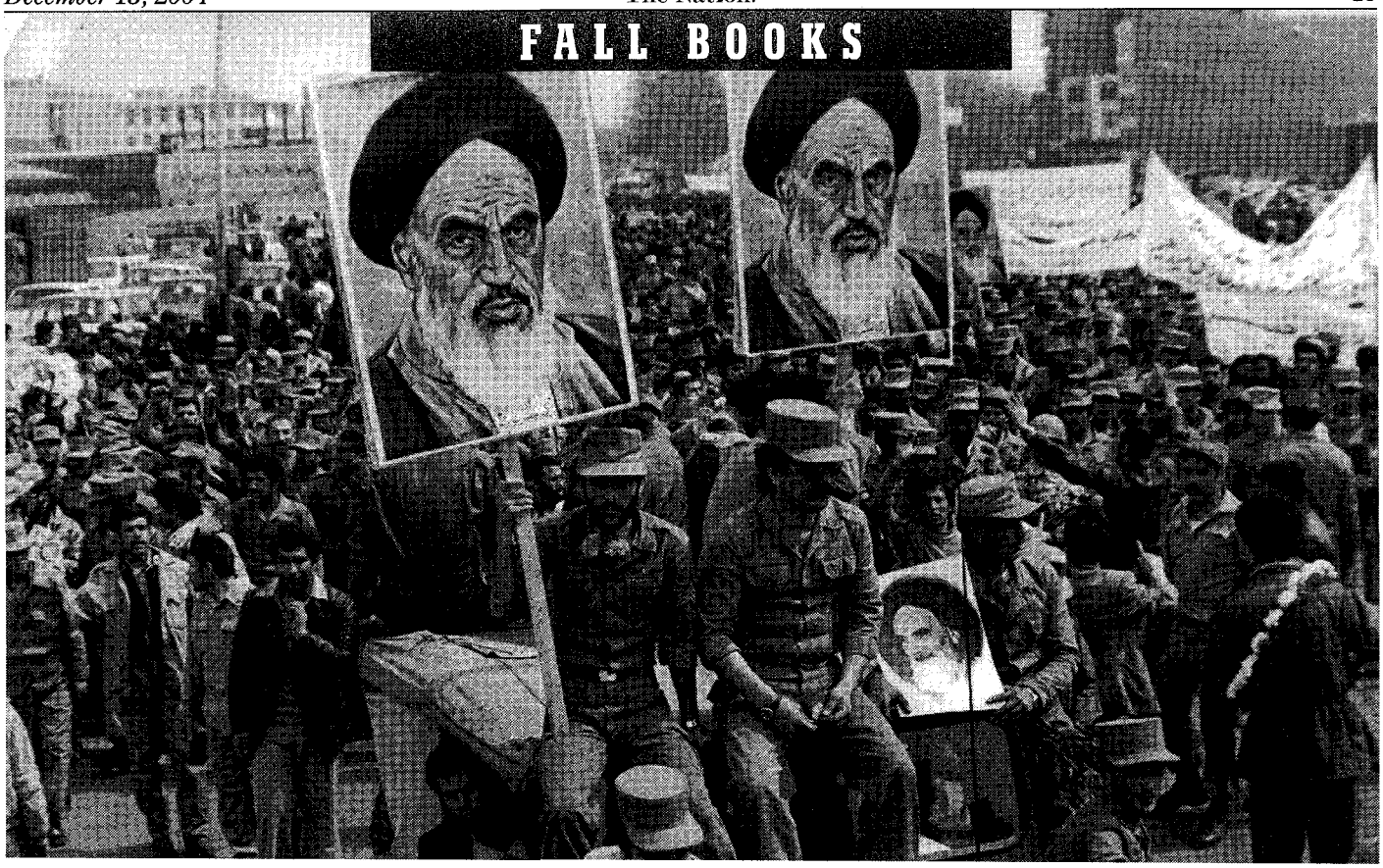

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Days of Rage

REZA ASLAN

THE CRISIS: The President, the Prophet, and the Shah—1979 and the Coming of Militant Islam.
By David Harris.
Little, Brown. 470 pp. $26.95.

TAKEN HOSTAGE: The Iran Hostage Crisis and America's First Encounter With Radical Islam.
By David Farber.
Princeton. 212 pp. $22.95.

On November 4, 1979, a few months after the collapse of the Iranian monarchy and the inauguration of Iran's Islamic Republic, a group of college students calling themselves the Muslim Students Following the Line of the Imam rushed the gates of the US Embassy in Tehran, scaled its walls and promptly took control of the compound and its diplomatic staff. The students' objective was simple. They would peacefully occupy the embassy's courtyard for forty-eight to seventy-two hours and use the ensuing spotlight both to present their objections to American meddling in Iranian affairs and to publicly discourage Iran's shaky provisional government from aligning itself with the Carter Administration. The students were unarmed—this was a peaceful act of civil disobedience, not a violent takeover. Once their grievances had been properly aired, they would release their captives and hand the embassy back over to the Americans.

This was not the first time the embassy had been attacked during that tumultuous year. Nine months earlier, on Valentine's Day, a smaller group had briefly captured the compound before being immediately dispatched by an irritated Ayatollah Kho-

Reza Aslan's first book, No god but God: The Origins, Evolution, and Future of Islam, *will be published by Random House in the spring.*

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meini, who personally apologized to William Sullivan, the American ambassador, for the incident. So when the embassy staff saw the Muslim Students running around the courtyard "like little kids in an amusement park," in the words of one Marine, they assumed this would be a repeat of the Valentine's Day seizure. Surely rescue would soon be on its way, especially once the Ayatollah, who had pledged to protect the embassy, received word of what had happened. No one—not the embassy staff nor their student captors—could have predicted that this would be the beginning of a hostage crisis that would seize the imaginations of both countries for 444 fretful, grueling days.

It has been more than two decades since the Iran hostage crisis drove a permanent wedge between the United States and its former ally, Iran. With the arrival of the twenty-fifth anniversary, two books—David Harris's *The Crisis* and David Farber's *Taken Hostage*—revisit the event now widely recognized as America's first encounter with militant Islam.

Harris, a former staff writer at *The New York Times Magazine* and *Rolling Stone*, has crafted a beautifully written, impeccably researched and remarkably astute account that draws on candid interviews with key American and Iranian figures to examine events from both sides of the conflict. The result is one of the most comprehensive, most compelling narratives of the hostage crisis ever written.

David Farber's *Taken Hostage* is narrower in scope, focusing almost exclusively on America's response to the crisis. Farber, a professor of twentieth-century American history at Temple University, provides a fascinating glimpse into how events in Iran capped for Americans a decade of unfulfilled expectations and widespread disillusionment in the wake of the Watergate scandal, the fall of Saigon and a spiraling energy crisis. Perhaps at no other time in US history could a man like Jimmy Carter have become President. Carter brought to the White House a sense of integrity and intelligence that had been sorely missing in the Nixon and Ford administrations. His emphasis on human rights and his public commitment to curb US involvement in the affairs of foreign countries were a means of injecting what he considered to be American moral principles into the country's foreign policy.

Yet in the eyes of his political enemies, it was precisely this "moral approach" to foreign policy that crippled the CIA, rendering it incapable of either predicting the Iranian revolution or coping with the hostage crisis that followed. Henry Kissinger in particular felt that Carter's foreign policy was "weak-kneed" and that Carter himself was "ill prepared and poorly suited" for the presidency.

Farber doesn't necessarily disagree with Kissinger's assessment. He portrays Carter as catastrophically unaware of the escalating situation in Iran until events had spun completely out of control. Reading Farber's account of Carter's earnest yet clumsy handling of the hostage crisis, one can't help but share Gary Sick's assessment that the White House seemed to be approaching Iran from a position of "unrelieved ignorance." Certainly Carter's unconsidered praise of the deeply unpopular Shah and his appraisal of Iran as "an island of stability in one of the more troubled areas in the world," indicates a shocking lack of insight into a country that almost everyone, including the President's own ambassador to Iran, recognized was on the verge of chaos and revolution.

Though aimed at the US, the embassy takeover was sparked by a power struggle between Iran's religious and secular forces.

But Carter's failure to anticipate and adequately deal with events in Iran was not entirely owing to his lack of political acumen. America's intelligence community had been severely handicapped by promises made by Carter's predecessors never to contact the Shah's political opponents. What's more, Carter's attempts to formulate a comprehensive policy on Iran were repeatedly frustrated by the internal power struggles taking place between his two most trusted advisers—Secretary of State Cyrus Vance, who favored negotiations with Khomeini and the revolutionaries, and National Security Adviser Zbigniew Brzezinski, who secretly encouraged the Shah through backdoor channels to use whatever force was necessary to crush the rebellion in Iran.

The backbiting and division that plagued the White House came to a head after the Shah fled Iran in January 1979. Vance, who specifically warned that the embassy in Tehran would be targeted if the exiled Shah were allowed to enter the United States, pressed Carter to turn the deposed monarch away. Brzezinski, however, was adamant that America's loyalties to a front-line ally in the cold war be preserved, and may even have supported Carter's political nemeses, Henry Kissinger and David Rockefeller, in their relentless campaign to grant the Shah asylum.

In the end, Carter chose to welcome the Shah into the United States, ostensibly to seek treatment for his cancer, a decision that Farber, like so many American historians, erroneously cites as the impetus for the embassy takeover. Indeed, Farber depicts the hostage crisis as merely "the second act" in a drama that began the moment the Shah set foot in the United States. Such statements are indicative of the great weakness of *Taken Hostage*. Farber has a firm grasp of American political and social history, but his knowledge of Iran is too limited to provide a complete account of the motives and rationale that sparked the hostage crisis and kept it going far longer than anyone on either side wanted.

The truth is the embassy takeover was not so much a response to American actions as it was the result of an internal battle between Khomeini's religious supporters and the secular leaders of the provisional government to control postrevolutionary Iran. Harris, who exhibits an exceptional awareness of Iranian culture and history, recognizes this and goes to great lengths to depict the Muslim Students as one of a large number of competing factions struggling to define the nature and scope of the new Islamic Republic. The students who captured the embassy were certainly anti-American, and they no doubt considered the US Embassy a "den of spies"—rightly so, as it turned out. However, their objective in attacking the embassy was not so much to punish the United States as to seize the political initiative for Khomeini and his clerical allies at a time when the country's religious and secular factions were at an impasse over the drafting of the new constitution.

As Harris demonstrates, their plan worked all too well. The provisional government boisterously protested the students' actions and fought fiercely for the unconditional and immediate release of the hostages. Khomeini, however, labeled the hostages spies, called the students' actions "a second revolution" and galvanized domestic support for a hugely popular cause: the release of the hostages in return for the extradition of the Shah (this despite the fact that the embassy takeover had been planned long before the Shah ever entered the United States, and without Khomeini's knowledge). With the country's disparate anti-imperialist factions seemingly united by this single, overpowering issue, the leaders of the provisional government

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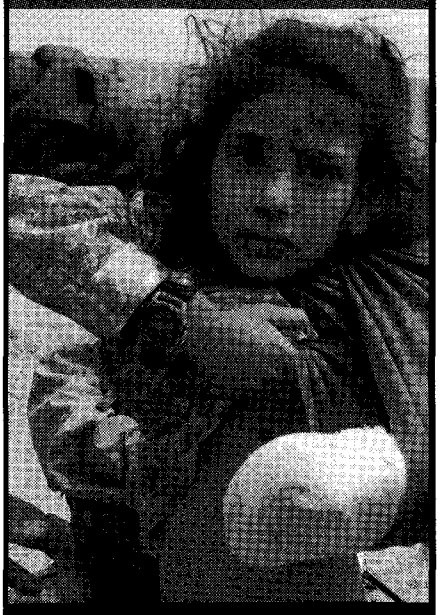

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had no choice but to resign, handing the government, the Constitution and the country to the clerics.

It is this ability to so deftly explore the nuances of an incredibly complex episode in American and Iranian history from both points of view that makes *The Crisis* a superb work of scholarship and a profoundly enjoyable read. Harris writes with the skill of a historian and the flair of a novelist. His narrative of the embassy takeover, the plight of the individual hostages (and the failed rescue mission to free them), the blunders, backdoor maneuverings and diplomatic miscues that, despite desperate attempts on both sides, kept the crisis going for more than a year matches the best spy novels.

Both Harris and Farber conclude their books by detailing how the hostage crisis became the dominant point of contention in the 1980 presidential elections between Carter and his Republican opponent, Ronald Reagan. But Harris especially delves into the ways Reagan's campaign manager, the wily future head of the CIA, William Casey, fended off the possibility of Carter pulling an "October surprise" by negotiating the release of the hostages before the election.

At the time, the political and cultural divide in Iran between the increasingly powerless secular democrats and the ruling clerical elite was threatening to plunge the country into civil war. The presence of the hostages only made matters worse by sanctioning and isolating Iran to the point of effectively shutting down its economy. After the Shah succumbed to cancer in the summer of 1980, three months before the US elections, there seemed no reason to keep the Americans any longer. Still, desperate as the regime was to be rid of their "guests," the Iranians did not wish to appear to bow to American pressure. They wanted to be certain to get something in return for the release of the captives. And, as Harris contends, the Republicans were offering more than the Democrats.

The Crisis exposes the secret agreement Republicans made with Iran's clerical establishment—who were keen to see Carter suffer for what they viewed as his unwavering support of the Shah—not to release the hostages until after the election. Despite decades of denials, the attempts by Republicans to thwart Carter's "October surprise" has been confirmed by numerous high-ranking Iranian officials as well as by a number of the American hostages, one of whom recalls watching his captors stare at their watches, literally waiting for the exact moment of Reagan's swearing-in ceremony before shuffling him and his fellow captives onto the waiting planes.

As both Harris and Farber recognize, there are startling parallels between America's first encounter with Islamic militancy and the current flailing "war on terrorism." Yet neither fully appreciates the profound changes that have taken place in Iran since that fateful November morning.

The old American Embassy, long ago transformed into what Iranian authorities drolly refer to as "a museum of anti-imperialism," is now closed to the public. Only a select few are allowed inside the compound. Near the gates, where two teenage soldiers stand guard, smoking cigarettes and idly sipping tea, a sign reads, WE WILL MAKE AMERICA FACE A SEVERE DEFEAT. Yet the massive, open courtyard where thousands once gathered regularly to celebrate the memory of that defeat is now a forgotten and deserted relic of a revolution long ago abandoned, particularly by those who most diligently fought for it.

Ibrahim Asgarzadeh, the founder of the Muslim Students Following the Line of the Imam and the instigator of the embassy takeover, currently heads the reformist Solidarity Party, whose platform calls for immediate rapprochement with the United States. Masoumeh Ebtekar, the woman who, as the principal liaison between the Muslim Students and the American press, was known simply as "Sister Mary," is vice president of environmental affairs, the highest ranking woman in the Iranian government, and an eloquent voice for throwing off the shackles of clerical rule in favor of democratic reform. Abbas Abdi, another prominent student leader during the hostage crisis, is serving multiple prison sentences for his fearless anticlerical work as editor of the reformist newspaper *Salam*.

For Americans, whose involvement in the Middle East is being questioned in a way it never has been before, the anniversary of the hostage crisis is an opportunity to reflect on the old and ongoing debate in the United States, between those who wish to re-engage with Iran and those who wish to further isolate and contain it. For most Iranians, however, and particularly for most of those who planned, took part in or supported the attack on the US Embassy, there is no debate. November 4 is an albatross slung around their necks, a bitter reminder of a revolution gone awry and a seemingly permanent obstacle that stands in the way of pursuing a rapprochement with the United States that nearly every Iranian—conservative or reformist—desperately desires. ■

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An Appetite for Liebling

DAVID THOMSON

JUST ENOUGH LIEBLING: Classic Work by the Legendary *New Yorker* Writer. By A.J. Liebling. Introduction by David Remnick. North Point. 534 pp. $27.50.

MOLLIE & OTHER WAR PIECES. By A.J. Liebling. Nebraska. 286 pp. $15.95.

If we had four or five Abbott Joseph Lieblings in Iraq and Washington, it might be a different war, one in which those hugely amiable, observant and amusable souls could bring us the news that, yes, war is hell and awful and hideous, but still, it is life carried on under exceptional but not deforming circumstances. And so in war people continue to behave oddly, but perhaps a little more so, while correspondents are hired to notice that and report it as kindly as possible in the assurance that one day soon boredom will return, and with boredom or stillness who knows if there may not be the chance again to relish a good bottle of Petrus without listening for the sounds of gunfire or spite?

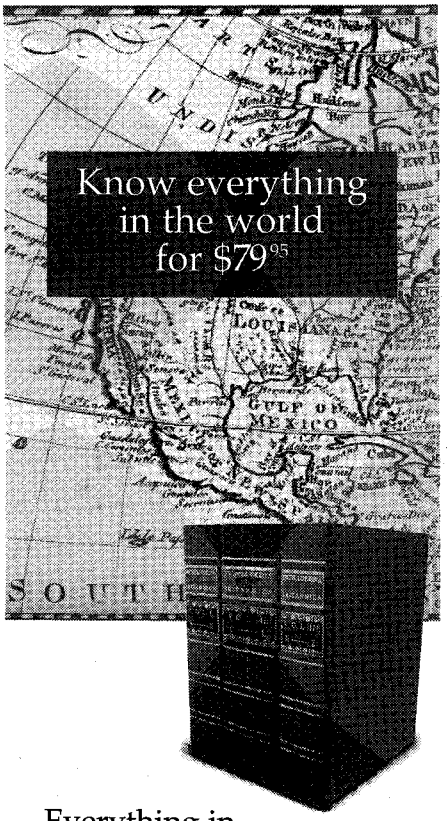
Instead, there's something about this war, and the wounds it exposes in ourselves, that takes away a wise man's faith in boredom, amusement and fine wine. And so to read A.J. Liebling now is an unbearable pleasure—not just to see what a resourceful, compassionate and entertaining man he was in the worst of his times—but to realize that our Reds' modern fierceness, their absurd trust in our own power (and the Blues' desperate loathing of it) leaves so little room for his quiet, patient good humor. Liebling delivered dispatches not just as a job, nor even because he needed to keep writing to avert the monstrous depression he felt lurking, but because describing human vagary in times of appalling melodrama and steady damage was to keep faith with the necessity of his war (the Second World War). And that is the difference: Nowadays our wars are so far from necessary that their cruelty and caprice still the urge to speak.

For instance, in March 1942 Liebling finds himself as the lone passenger on a Norwegian tanker, convoying back to the United States with water ballast, so that it can return to Europe sleek and slow with oil. It is an uneventful crossing, in which Liebling's unquenchable fondness for the Norwegians clashes with their lugubrious lack of words, baseball stories and piquant rations. We do not need to know the gourmet in Liebling. It is enough to hear him list the servings of milk soup and other shipboard schemes to evade starvation. But somehow, in some dank recess of storage or suspended nature, there are eggs:

> The ship had not taken stores for more than three months now, and the eggs caused a daily argument between the steward and me. For several mornings he had served them hard-boiled, a sign he had no real confidence in them. [This is crucial, for in Liebling's eyes confidence—in being wrong as much as being right—determines most human action.] Each morning I would open my first egg and say, "*Darlig*," which is Norwegian for "Bad."
>
> The steward would protest, "*Naj, naj*."
>
> "But this one has green spots inside the shell," I would say.
>
> "Ex like dot sometimes," he would maintain.
>
> The captain always ate his eggs without any remark; his silence accused me of finicking. At last, one morning towards the end of the voyage, he opened an egg and looked at the steward. "*Darlig*," he said. The steward looked embarrassed. Then the captain ate the egg; a bad hard-boiled egg is probably as nourishing as a good one.
>
> Next morning the steward brought me an amorphous yellow mass on a plate. It tasted mostly of sugar, but he offered me a jug of maple- and cane-sugar syrup to pour on it. I took a spoonful, fancying it some Norse confection, and said, "Not bad. What do you call it?" The steward said, "I call it ummelet. Same ex."

If you are still upright and silent, then Liebling may not be for you. But you may be on your way to preferment in the new Administration of George W. Bush. If, however, you are remotely tickled by the tableau of Liebling—a small, earnest, rotund

David Thomson is the author of The Whole Equation: A History of Hollywood *and* The New Biographical Dictionary of Film, *both now available from Knopf.*



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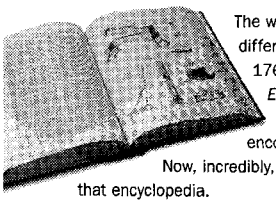

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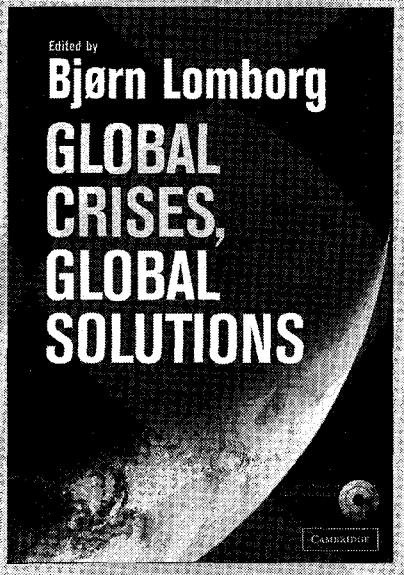

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man, more a bishop's prelate than a sailor—having traded in his preoccupation with prose for the urge to sample every item on every menu, confined on a rusty ship working its way at a speed measured in single-digit knots across the uncertain Atlantic, enduring Norwegian English, fishy concoctions and rotten ex with a straight face—then *Just Enough Liebling* is the book for you and anyone else you may know on the downward slopes of a life sentence. For as Liebling knew all too well, life is an ummelet that requires the fracture of some eggs—if you can find a sufficiently robust instrument to crack them on.

In his warm introduction to *Just Enough Liebling*, David Remnick describes an experience from his own youth. He was in Paris, at Shakespeare & Company, when a friend found a volume of Liebling in the Used section and handed it to him. Remnick began to read there in the shop and finished the book that same night—it was *The Sweet Science*, for Liebling the tender, clumsy and noble typist loved the brutality of fighters and the wild airs of the riff-raff who surrounded them. Remnick had never read Liebling before, and I daresay hardly lets a month go by now without dipping into him for consolation. I am bound to admit that before this assignment (and I am older than Liebling was when he died), I honored the name without knowing the books. In a few weeks I have been turned into a connoisseur, tracking down odd titles, marveling at the industry of a man who surely reckoned to give his best or longest hours to the pleasure of the table (and who was also married three times), and who can hardly write a sentence without making you smile.

But then, halfway through the next paragraph, you may find yourself bursting out with laughter, as the joke sinks in—for the joke lies so often in the noble way splendid prose and wry stoicism have drawn a brief veil over all the ordinary forms of hell. It is a sprightliness in the face of everyday horror that held Mark Twain together, and I doubt it will seem funny to everyone. I'm not at all sure a Donald Rumsfeld would find himself in tears several sentences after first reading "Not bad. What do you call it?" A Rumsfeld has other things to cry over, after all, and the faint yet sturdy ingenuity of so much looking on the bright side is not quite what Rummy gives medals for.

Still, you have to wonder how any sane person—even in Paris, with modest English—would let a copy of any Liebling book get away and end up in the Used section. Unless he was in extreme need of some funds with a saving breakfast in the offing.

Or not. Again, it is the marvel in Liebling's touch that no Norwegian could be offended by his treatment of that dry nation and its drier phlegm, just as no one of any other tongue could resist the hilarity of the deadly end-game that the Norwegian captain keeps for any attempts at small talk, that civilized gesture Liebling practiced just because he and the captain of the tanker took every meal together and because Liebling believed in talk with food, just as bees are meant to attend new blossom.

> Once, in an effort to make talk, I asked him, "How would you say, 'Please pass me the butter, Mr Petersen,' in Norwegian?' He said, "We don't use 'please' or 'mister.' It sounds too polite. And you never have to say 'pass me' something in a Norwegian house, because the people force food on you, so if you said 'pass' they would think they forgot something and their feelings would be hurt. The word for butter is smor."

Liebling was born in 1904, the child of Austria and San Francisco: His father had been a furrier in that far country; his mother was from a Jewish family at the Golden Gate. But he was born on Manhattan's Upper East Side and was forever attached to New York. After being expelled from Dartmouth, he attended the Columbia School of Journalism, but he thrived largely on newspapers, with the wit to realize that this appetite swallows the incorrect along with the correct. Still, he knew that newspapers had made him: "Homicide, adultery, no-hit pitching, and Balkanism were concepts that, left to my own devices, I would have encountered much later in life." I like to think of Liebling as the blithe slave of deadlines all his life, forever writing against the clock, briefly fulfilled to have today's paper in his hand, yet all too aware that by the evening it would be employed in wrapping up the trash.

For the next ten years or so, Liebling was a journalistic freelancer. He came and went at the *New York Times* because he tended to be a little whimsical with the facts. And then he had a year in Paris, a year that shaped his life, his philosophy and the roundness of his body. Remnick rightly treasures the moment at which Liebling found a proper balance for literature and

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dining (his abiding passions). He was remarking on how remorselessly Marcel Proust had exploited a mere madeleine:

> In the light of what Proust wrote with so mild a stimulus, it is the world's loss that he did not have a heartier appetite. On a dozen Gardiners Island oysters, a bowl of clam chowder, a peck of steamers, some bay scallops, three sautéed soft-shelled crabs, a few ears of fresh-picked corn, a thin swordfish steak of generous area, a pair of lobsters, and a Long Island duck, he might have written a masterpiece.

That menu is sturdily American, though in practice Liebling preferred French cuisine. But the gentle teasing of the Proustian set does not really mask or let Liebling forget the fact that he had tried to write masterpieces of fiction himself, and failed. His happy appearance—there was something of Pickwick in him, and a good deal of the great character actor John McGiver, but the attempt to smother a wink or a smile with an earnest frown was all his own—did not conceal this sad destiny: Liebling was a wistful willow wrapping himself up in meal after meal. And dead at 59, probably with cholesterol numbers to rival Ted Williams's average.

By 1935 Liebling came to rest, or nest, at *The New Yorker*. About a year later he secured his reputation there with a three-part profile of Father Divine—Liebling was always in his element with, and most considerate of, that breed of American who chooses fraud as his path to glory. Remnick appreciates the way Liebling (and his pal Joseph Mitchell) were rather less journalists, avid on the track of facts, than wordsmiths who took to the streets and the bars simply in order that something like event or experience might overtake them. Remnick does not go so far as to consider how likely it is that such hirings would happen at *The New Yorker* today. The magazine is more fond of celebrity and leanness (Tina-ness?), and Liebling might not fare so well in an age that takes facts or fact-checking so seriously. Still, Ken Auletta obviously believes in dinner.

Liebling could handle a real issue when it came along—read him on Louisiana's Earl Long or "Mollie," the G.I. whose nickname came from Molotov because of his radical opinions. Still, time and again, I think, Liebling is most himself as the man of education and natural understanding who keeps a very friendly regard for doubt, forgetting and never quite knowing what has happened or what you think. Yes, it can sound like fuddle, muddle or having had two glasses too many of the Petrus. But it is Liebling's essential stalwart nature to defend doubt and indecision, and to know that as much as a set, approved attitude may be called for, experience wasn't really like that. Consider this, from his own foreword to *Mollie*:

> Collectively, the wars were the central theme of my life from October 1939, until the end of 1944, and I sometimes feel a deplorable nostalgia for them—as my friend the Count Rzewski once said about something else: "So disgusting, so deplorable, so human." The times were full of certainties: we could be certain we were right—and we were—and that certainty made us certain that anything we did was right, too. I have seldom been sure I was right since. It had attractive uncertainties, too: you never had to think about the future, because you didn't know if you would have one. Yet the risk was so disseminated over time that you seldom felt that this was the moment when the future might end.
>
> I know that it is socially acceptable to write about war as an unmitigated horror, but subjectively at least, it was not true, and you can feel its pull on men's memo-

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ries at the maudlin reunions of war divisions. They mourn for their dead, but also for war.

And when it came to boxing, Liebling rather preferred the blur of impression that remained from a fight to any strict point-counting system. "Part of the pleasure of going to a fight," he wrote,

> is reading the newspapers the next morning to see what the sportswriters think happened. This pleasure is prolonged, in the case of a big bout, by the fight films. You can go to them to see what *did* happen. What you eventually think you remember about the fight will be an amalgam of what you thought you saw there, what you read in the papers you saw and what you saw in the films.

That existential surrender is prelude to a magnificent account of Sugar Ray Robinson's return bout at the Polo Grounds on September 12, 1951. Earlier that year, in London, in the course of a rather flamboyant tour of Europe (I believe I recall a pink convertible), Robinson had lost the world middleweight title to Randy Turpin (from Leamington in the Midlands). That was the first great fight this correspondent ever heard on the radio and I am weeping now as I recall the ecstasy in the commentator's voice as, after fifteen rounds, a London points decision went to Turpin. Two months later, in New York, Robinson was all business as he regained the world title. Here is Liebling torn between the evidence of his own eyes and the new truth called movie:

> The films are especially insidious. During the last twenty seconds or so of the fight between Sugar Ray Robinson and Randy Turpin, for example, it seemed to me from where I sat, in the lower stand at the Polo Grounds, that Robinson hit the failing Turpin with every blow he threw—a succession of smashing hits such as I had never before seen a fighter take without going down. The films show that Robinson missed quite a few of them, and that Turpin, although not able to hit back, was putting up some defensive action until the last second—swaying low, with his gloves shielding his sad face, gray-white in the films. It was the face of a schoolboy who has long trained himself not to cry under punishment and who has had endless chances to practice, like an inmate at Dotheboys Hall.

It is there, in that aside, that Liebling becomes immortal, in the dead-on factual detail (the sad look that never left Turpin's face, not even in the short time he held the title) and the larger vision of the necessary courage in the unlucky and melancholy of this world.

The sadness comes through, despite Liebling's determination to make his prose like champagne. He had his problems, even if readers felt that he and *The New Yorker* were a match made in heaven. I can imagine that the ladies adored Liebling and sometimes came close to unsettling his dedication to the deadline. Look at that face: Hasn't it known temptation? But his marriages were defeats, more or less. Number one, Ann McGinn, turned out to be schizophrenic, inclined to disappear for days at a time and the forlorn subject of many medical bills. Number two, Lucille Spectorsky, was a spendthrift and simply not able to get the jokes or the timing in Liebling's own Sugar Joe delivery. Still, he was resourceful. When the divorce to end that marriage obliged Liebling to endure a brief residence in cuisine-deprived Reno, Nevada, he heard of the vexed state of the Paiute Indians at nearby Pyramid Lake, went up to visit them and delivered the reports that now make up *A Reporter at Large: Dateline—Pyramid Lake, Nevada.* To see the ingenuity with which Liebling observes that bleak landscape and its bleaker human history is to know that he, or someone like him, might still bring freshness and humor to Iraq.

Marriage number three, to the writer Jean Stafford, herself a battered relic of earlier battles (she had been married to Robert Lowell and horribly injured in a car crash that occurred with him at the wheel), was happy but curtailed. For Liebling was so overweight the dire word "obese" came into use. He had gout and pneumonia, and this was long before Lipitor. In addition, he had regular bills, tax notices and the same old nagging of deadlines even as spirit and inspiration trailed away.

In a just America, Liebling's fat face would be on a stamp, and there would be movies extolling his life and his hours into the night typing up those delicate, poker-faced, but comic accounts of having been there, or thereabouts, or near enough to guess what kind of a piece might be written. *Just Enough Liebling* is a witty but provocative title—count on it, you are going to want much more. ■

Pop and Circumstance

J. HOBERMAN

GUERNICA: The Biography of a Twentieth-Century Icon.
By Gijs van Hensbergen. Bloomsbury. 373 pp. $35.

You may recall the to-do occasioned two winters past by a certain shift in the *mise-en-scène* at the United Nations. New blue drapes appeared to conceal the grisaille tapestry hung in the corridor outside the Security Council chamber in which then–Secretary of State Colin Powell had come to make the case for war against Iraq, and where the secretary was scheduled to hold a press conference. Some newspapers reported that Powell's staff demanded that the offending artwork be concealed. The Internet was aflame; some weeks later *The Weekly Standard* attempted damage control by explaining that TV crews had only requested that a distractingly busy backdrop be simplified.

The latter was closer to the truth. Powell would have shared the screen with a horse's rear. Still, Pablo Picasso's *Guernica* was back in circulation—and not just as the tapestry that, unable to purchase the thing itself, Nelson Rockefeller commissioned and his widow donated to the UN. *Guernica*'s shrieking horse, dead children and terrorized wraiths were held aloft on placards at antiwar demonstrations in the streets of New York and plastered across a Hollywood Boulevard billboard. Sophie Matisse, great-granddaughter of the French painter, exhibited her colorized appropriation of Picasso's most famous painting—inspired, she explained, by the destruction of the twin towers. As war approached, *The New Yorker* and *Harper's* had a public spat over which first had the idea to emblazon its cover with the image that Gijs van Hensbergen considers the modern equivalent of the Crucifixion.

Hensbergen's "biography" is the eleventh book (in English) devoted to Picasso's

J. Hoberman, senior film critic for The Village Voice, *is the author, most recently, of* The Dream Life: Movies, Media, and the Mythology of the Sixties *(New Press).*

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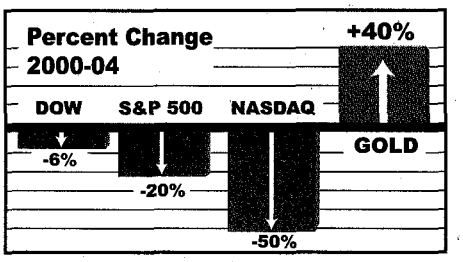

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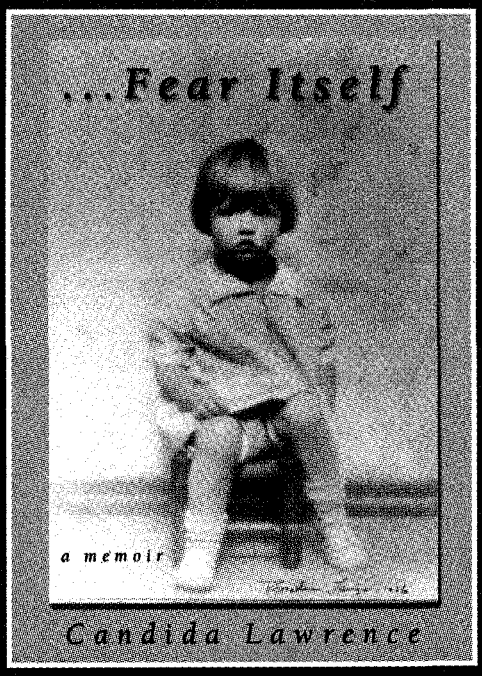

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mural. As such, it's more interested in the work's career than its quality, less concerned with *Guernica*'s iconography than with its iconic status. For, something heavier than a painting, *Guernica* symbolizes both the horror of war and the idea that a masterpiece might have a political significance; it promotes the hope that modern art could even be progressive. At the same time, however, *Guernica* represents something recently demonstrated in this year's passionate torrent of anti-Bush agitprop, namely art's ineffectuality in the production of concrete political results. Ubiquitous and universal, an antifascist altarpiece that even a fascist might covet, *Guernica*—as Andy Warhol once said of the Empire State Building—is a star.

Is *Guernica* defined by a specific historical moment or by the artist's personal mythology? In January 1937 Picasso—already producing satiric anti-Franco graphics to benefit the beleaguered Spanish Republic—was commissioned to provide a mural for the Spanish pavilion at the upcoming Paris International Exposition. Whatever his original idea may have been, it was obliterated on the afternoon of April 26, when the German Luftwaffe reduced the Basque city of Gernika to rubble. This aerial attack, which lasted only three hours, was unprecedented in Europe. It was intended as a demonstration and, thanks largely to the dispatches filed by British war correspondent George Lowther Steer, became instantly synonymous with the mass destruction of innocent civilians—an exposition before the Exposition, a little twentieth-century horror presaging the inconceivable ones of Auschwitz and Hiroshima.

Five days later, Picasso began to develop his ideas, drawing on the specific imagery—the ritual of the *corrida*, the myth of the minotaur, images of Christian martyrdom and suffering women—that had characterized his work for the past half-dozen years. Sketches and preparatory paintings poured forth: the artist as force of nature. Picasso's lover Dora Maar made a photographic record of the process; Paul Eluard, working on his poem "The Victory of Guernica," visited the studio frequently during those weeks. At one with the zeitgeist, Picasso wasn't the only painter to take this subject—or even perhaps the first. René Magritte painted *Le Drapeau Noir*, a dark-blue sky filled with enigmatic flying machines. Two artists in far-off New York, Philip Guston and the social surrealist Anton Refregier, executed canvases inspired by the fate of the Basque city. Picasso began painting his in June, completing the 275-square-foot mural in time for the International Exposition in July.

Anarchists and POUMistas were being liquidated in Barcelona; the Stalinist terror had resumed in Moscow. Boris Iofán's monumental Soviet pavilion faced Albert Speer's even taller German pavilion, the Nazi eagle peering down on Vera Mujina's forward-striding *Worker and Collective Farm Woman*. Overshadowed by its totalitarian neighbors, the Spanish pavilion was nevertheless characterized by an ambitious, coordinated statement on the Civil War—involving posters, graphic displays and documentary films. Grenade in hand, José Antonio's rough-hewn and resolute bronze *Soldier* stood guard outside; within, Picasso evoked the suffering of the civilian population.

Thanks in part to its near-monochromatic palette, *Guernica* had the authority of a photograph. The initial reception to the mural was, according to Hensbergen, "strangely muted." Spanish officials were disappointed that *Guernica* wasn't more partisan, and the Basques, in particular, were displeased by the artist's subjectivity. Years later Rudolf Arnheim would observe, *Guernica* was not based on a "dualistic antagonism." The aggressors were invisible. Not a political statement but an illustration of existential terror, the mural "depicts the effects of a brutality that

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strikes from nowhere." But weren't these tortured, distorted bodies the result of applied fascism?

Then *Guernica* went on tour. The mural was exhibited throughout Scandinavia, arriving in London on September 30, 1938, the very day of the Munich Pact between Hitler and British Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain. *Guernica* served as a fundraiser in England and the United States before making its formal debut as the centerpiece of the Museum of Modern Art's Picasso retrospective, which opened six weeks after the Nazi invasion of Poland. In that context, the mural was not just an antifascist statement but a prime chunk of European Modernism that had found refuge in America. The curator James Thrall Soby declared *Guernica* "the most forceful achievement of our century." Here, *pace* Adorno, was poetry after Auschwitz before Auschwitz.

Meanwhile, New York was gripped with Picasso-mania. Some 60,000 visitors jammed MoMA; the window displays at nearby Bonwit Teller and Bergdorf Goodman were inspired by Picasso. Hensbergen is even more emphatic in detailing the impact that *Guernica* had on local painters. Arshile Gorky, the town's leading *picasseño*, was devastated; *Guernica* summoned up the Armenian genocide, which he had witnessed as a child. For seekers of the timeless and tragic like Adolph Gottlieb, Mark Rothko and Barnett Newman, *Guernica* was, Hensbergen says, "a totem to the idea of the sublime."

De Kooning, whose native Rotterdam would soon be destroyed by the Luftwaffe, was stunned by the implications of Picasso's fractured space and bravura "wrap-around picture"—and what is Robert Motherwell's ongoing series *Elegies for the Spanish Republic* if not a two-decade-long response to *Guernica*. It "floored me," Lee Krasner recalled. Even more than Gorky, Jackson Pollock took on *Guernica*, analyzed it and moved beyond it. (It was Pollock's *One* that replaced *Guernica* in MoMA's permanent exhibition.)

While New York painters pondered *Guernica*'s scale and grappled with its pictorial implications, Picasso himself became increasingly political. The artist joined the Communist Party in 1944; as the war ended, he executed a second "Guernica," the large grisaille *Charnel House*; in January 1951 he would produce a third one, *Massacre in Korea*. Unlike *Guernica*, *Massacre in Korea* presents robot death soldiers as well as their naked victims. (Hensbergen calls it "the one canvas that you wish Picasso had never painted.") More popular was the dove that the artist featured on a poster designed for the Communist-organized Paris Peace Congress in April 1949.

What sort of political figure did Picasso cut? An August 1937 editorial in the *New Masses* had called attention to the artist's bold antifascism; the Communist journal would soon hail him as "the greatest painter of modern times." But a long interview in the *New Masses*' March 1945 issue, dealing in part with Picasso's political commitment, prompted illustrator and Stalin sympathizer Rockwell Kent to dismiss Picasso's recent work as "just plain silly" and "without a single redeeming feature." Nor was Kent the only true believer to attack the world's leading celebrity Communist. In a bellicose 1947 defense of the new Soviet art, *Pravda* singled out Matisse and Picasso as decadent formalists. The same year, the critic Vladimir Kemenov went further, attacking even the culminating expression of universal antifascism: "The images of *Guernica* are as monstrous and pathological as in Picasso's other paintings.... The aim of Picasso's morbid, repulsive works is not to criticize the contradictions of reality, but to make an aesthetic apology for capitalism."

Capitalist diva or ambassador of peace, *Guernica* went back

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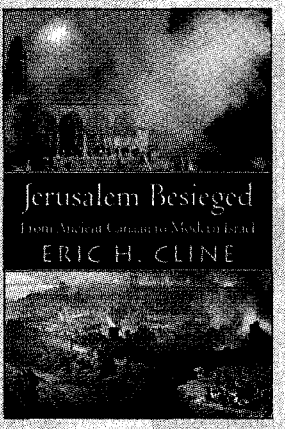

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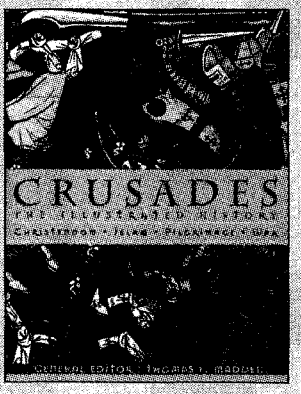

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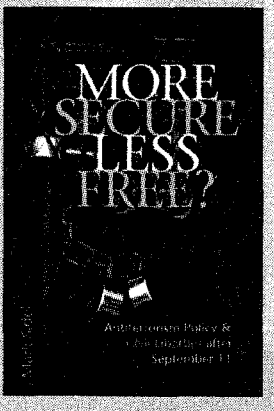

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on the road after the Korean War. The painting was the centerpiece of Italy's first Picasso retrospective; it traveled on to Brazil and toured Europe throughout 1955 and early 1956. *Guernica* was exhibited in Munich, Cologne, Hamburg, Brussels, Amsterdam and Stockholm, returning in triumph for Picasso's 75th birthday to New York, where it was installed in the third-floor gallery at MoMA. Even the Soviets began to relax. By 1971 Leonid Brezhnev was free to pose before a Picasso canvas.

No less than Picasso's dove, his mural became an emblem of the international peace movement. Effacing *Guernica*'s anti-fascist past and perhaps inoculating it against charges of Communist propaganda, MoMA felt compelled to place a panel denying that the painting had any political significance beyond the artist's "abhorrence of war and brutality." Alain Resnais's 1950 collage-film *Guernica* populated the destroyed Basque city with Picassoid ghosts, accompanied by Spanish actress María Casares's reading of Eluard's poem and Guy Bernard's spare, solemn score. More than any contemporary painter, Resnais is *Guernica*'s aesthetic heir. His short appreciation would provide the template for subsequent essays in highly formalist Protest Modernism: *Night and Fog*, *Hiroshima Mon Amour* and *Muriel*. (The frenzied pyre of war footage, staged and actual, that opens Jean-Luc Godard's new film *Notre Musique* might be seen as another example of *guernicaisme*.)

Given the toll taken by four years of travel, *Guernica*, Picasso decided, would remain in New York until its final transport to Spain, following the death or (less likely) the fall of Francisco Franco. The painting scarcely had to tour, however, to be incorporated into the protest rhetoric of the Vietnam War. Numerous posters appropriated *Guernica* as an image, particularly after the late 1969 revelation of the My Lai massacre. MoMA's third floor was the unwilling host to occasional antiwar vigils. Several antiwar groups contacted Picasso and requested he withdraw his painting from MoMA. After consulting with his dealer Daniel-Henry Kahnweiler, however, Picasso decided that the once-again relevant painting should stay. "The truth of the matter is that by means of *Guernica* I have the pleasure of making a political statement every day in the middle of New York City," he told his friend, the poet Rafael Alberti.

As early as 1967 the activist painter Leon Golub warned a symposium on the art of social protest that *Guernica* risked overexposure. To judge from Hensbergen's book, it certainly seems difficult to say anything new about the painting as painting. In early 1974, less than a year after Picasso's death, the future art-dealer Tony Shafrazi attempted to redeem the cliché. Ostensibly protesting Nixon's pardon of My Lai massacre culprit William Calley and in imitation of the graffiti artists he would champion, Shafrazi defaced *Guernica* with—easily removable—red spray paint: KILL LIES ALL.

Nor was Shafrazi's the only desecration. Peter Saul's 1973 canvas *Liddul Guernica* represents Picasso's painting as a construction in udders and inflated latex, with handy labels affixed: "sensubble arrt," "bewtiffle arrt," "expweshun issum," "dah-dah izzum," "foney coobeezm." The shrieking central figure, leaning out a window, none other than "Paablow." Saul recognized that, whatever its original intention, *Guernica* was Pop. (In 1974 Art Spiegelman quoted *Guernica* in his most ambitious graphic story before *Maus*, "Ace Hole, Midget Detective." What's remarkable is how well Picasso's image anticipates the distortions of the cartoon universe.)

In Franco's Spain, however, one might be jailed merely for receiving a *Guernica* postcard through the mail. This did not prevent much discussion, recounted by Hensbergen, on the nature of the painting's eventual disposition. Should it reside in the Prado, per Picasso's wishes, or perhaps go to Madrid's newly planned Museo de Art Contemporáneo? Sensubble or bewtiffle? Even Franco was involved in the maneuvering to appropriately place this national treasure. The dictator died in 1975, and the war was over.

Six years later, *Guernica* arrived in Spain—a source of prestige and much ancillary merchandise. Hensbergen, who refurbishes *Guernica*'s aura the way another might restore the canvas itself, notes without particular irony that even the wooden crate that had protected *Guernica* in its voyage across the Atlantic was preserved and put on display as a holy relic. ■

Lost in America

VIVIAN GORNICK

OTHER PEOPLE'S HOUSES. By Lore Segal. New Press. 312 pp. Paper $14.95.

HER FIRST AMERICAN. By Lore Segal. New Press. 287 pp. Paper $14.95.

In no literature in the world has the immigrant novel been more varied, more original, more persistent than in ours—and this for the most obvious of reasons. The word "America" has been experienced, for at least 150 years, by millions all over the world, as a euphemism for the fabled land, where, washing up half drowned on a richly receptive shore, one is assured salvation of an undreamt-of order. So they have been driven to come—wave upon wave upon wave of Jews, Italians, Irish, Latinos, Asians, Africans—and, sooner or later, large numbers of them produce the written document detailing the disparity between the fantasy and the actuality: the one that is so powerful it seems to the writer that now just to utter the word America in quotes is to achieve metaphor.

Only rarely do these novels have a life beyond the one given them on publication day. Even when well written, they are, all too often, claustrophobically enclosed by a tale of survival beyond which America itself remains an abstraction, hardly ever quickening into the life with which a real—rather than a testifying—protagonist would have to engage. A perfect example is Abraham Cahan's 1917 *The Rise of David Levinsky*, an early rags-to-riches story with a strong psychological bent that fails to deepen precisely because Cahan's character is sealed into a ghetto environment that remains static. Levinsky's New York is crowded with Lower East Side Jews who hand him on, one to another, until at last he prospers, but the city itself never emerges as a place of vast and varied doings beyond the streets of the ghetto, where the characters soon become indistinguishable. The sole development in the novel, finally, is Levinsky's awareness of the absence of development.

Yet the genre is a resilient one. To read an immigrant novel of, say, 1910, conceived in social realism and sentiment, followed by one written fifty years later, in the

Vivian Gornick has just completed The Solitude of Self: Thinking About Elizabeth Cady Stanton, *to be published next fall by Farrar, Straus & Giroux.*

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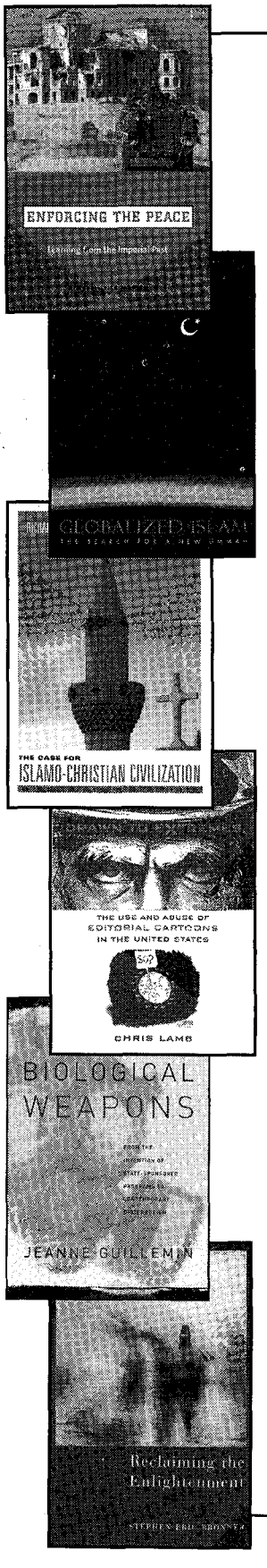
wake of Modernism and the Holocaust, is to see how stubbornly it has kept itself alive—and every now and then sheltered a piece of work that bursts the bounds of its own conventions, thereby announcing the presence in our midst of a genuine writer.

Lore Segal was born in Vienna in 1928, the daughter of educated, fairly well-to-do Jews. Nine months after Hitler took Austria, she was sent, just 10 years old, to England, as part of the rescue mission that came to be known as the Kindertransport. The clever little girl wrote an affecting letter to the British refugee committee and within a year her parents, sponsored by well-to-do Brits, were admitted to England as a cook and a butler. For the next seven years the parents worked as a domestic couple in one upper-class house or another, while Lore lived separately, also in one English household after another. When Lore's father died at the end of the war, she and her mother made their way to the Dominican Republic, where an uncle was waiting to be admitted to the United States. In 1951 visas came through for the whole family, and Lore's life as a refugee was transformed into that of an immigrant.

Her story took twenty years to tell, and came in two volumes—the first published in 1964 as a fictionalized memoir, *Other People's Houses*, the second in 1985 as a novel, *Her First American*. Together, these books—both reissued this fall by the New Press—reflect, with peculiar power, both the change in European literary sensibility brought about by the Second World War and the one jolted into life by the very American 1960s.

Other People's Houses begins in Vienna in the fall of 1937, rapidly sketching in the speed with which the Nazi takeover is accomplished, and the Jews from one day to the next are either running for or losing their lives. In all this mayhem, a little girl of novelistic intelligence and enterprising temperament is caught up, observing herself at the same time that she is being pushed—both frantically and as in a dream—into fear and excitement. When the arrangement is made to secure Lore a place on the first experimental children's transport to England, even as she is feeling "as if my inside had been suddenly scooped away," she thinks, "Wow! I'm off to England!"

This complicated inner circumstance—a sinking heart coupled with unquenchable curiosity—develops in the young Lore what she later called "a survival trick with a price tag." In England, in 1938, the "trick" enabled her to endure brilliantly the double isolation of being separated from her par-



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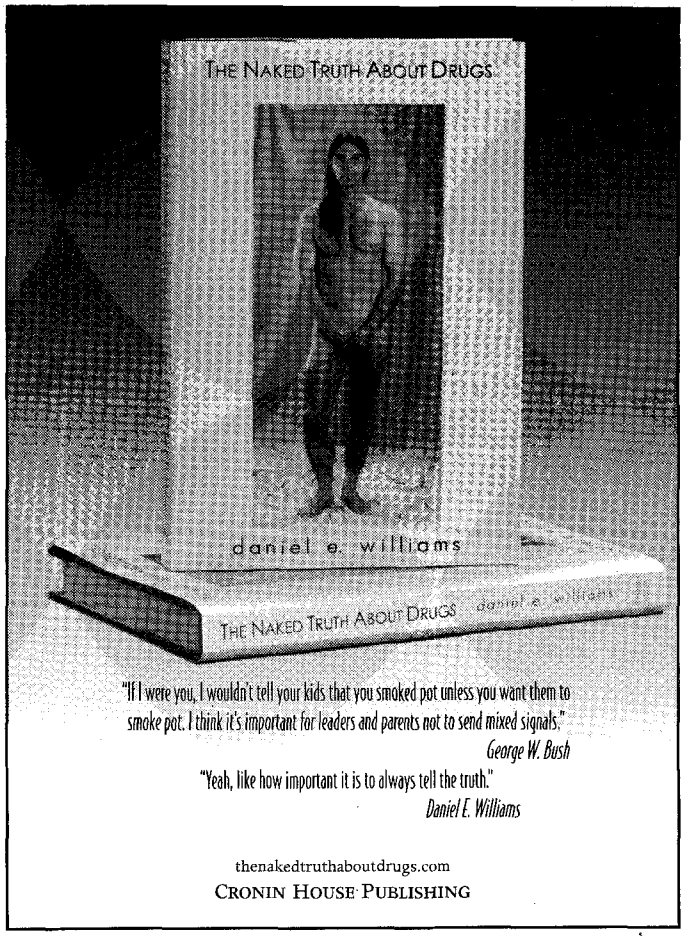
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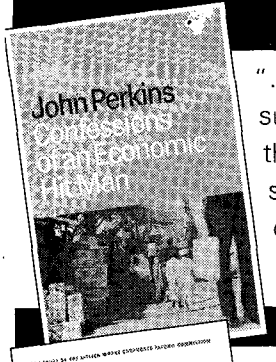

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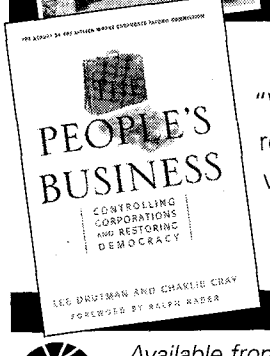
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ents and repeatedly having to absorb the sometimes even greater pain of her refugee status. Early on, she wets her pants and overhears her first foster mother—the self-satisfied Mrs. Levine of Liverpool—say to her daughter, "I told you they don't bring up children over there the way we do here in England." The little girl understands with a shock that she is being perceived as "other."

Watchfulness of a high order becomes second nature to Lore. Called out of class in March of 1939 by the formidable Mrs. Levine to be told that her parents have arrived in England, she listens with the now habituated gravity that Mrs. Levine finds so irritating. "Well! So! Aren't you excited, you funny child?" Yes, Lore tells her, she is excited. "But," she tells the reader,

> I was busy noticing the way my chest was emptying, my head clearing, and my shoulders being freed of some huge weight that must, since I now felt it being rolled away, have been there all this time without my knowing it. Just as when the passing of nausea or the unknotting of a cramp leaves the body with a new awareness of itself, I stood sensuously at ease, breathing in and out.

This is the true end of childhood: heedless spontaneity giving way to the self-protection of neutral observation. Standing in a schoolyard among other refugee children, she is told that the parents of a little girl she knows, also in the schoolyard, are dead and that she is now an orphan. Lore stares openly in the child's direction: The word "orphan" interests her. "I kept looking curiously at Helene who was an orphan. She stood by herself in the middle of the schoolyard looking before her. She still wore her little thick coat and her rabbit's-wool hat tied under the chin. One would never have guessed from looking at her that her parents were dead."

It's the tone of the narrating voice in *Other People's Houses* that lends the book its distinction. In other circumstances Segal's predilection for observation without commentary in the face of human extremity might sound slightly mad. But these are not other circumstances. These are circumstances that require precisely her degree of remove. An ironic intelligence coupled with a gift for detachment is speaking out of a time and place that strongly encourage what might best be called engaged wariness: precisely the psychological balancing act out of which postwar minimalism was born.

How many European novels of the 1950s have we read in which the reader finds oneself cast adrift on a tide of surreal-sounding prose because while the characters seem ordinary enough, the remove is disorienting: Where are we? Who is speaking? What are we to make of what is being said? Something stunned, dreamlike, permanently anesthetized in the narration. And then we realize: It's the war that is haunting these pages. The war is the drain, the gap, the terrible lassitude at the heart of the writing.

It is a remarkable memoir indeed that, written in New York City in the late 1950s, can so strongly resemble not the structure but the feel of postwar European fiction. While *Other People's Houses* is filled with vivid portraits and some marvelous close-ups—England certainly escapes abstraction—what dominates the book is this tone: the tone of one whom history has stunned, and made go cold all over.

When Lore is trapped in the Dominican Republic for three years, the full meaning of her permanent statelessness begins to dawn on her. Who is she? Where does she belong? What does the future hold? In a paroxysm of youthful defiance (she's now 21) she begins to long for England—that's who she'll be: English!—

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carrying around in her head some emblematic memory of geese on a lawn under English trees. But when a woman who works at the British consulate actually provides her with a visa, she freezes:

> I was horrified: Behind the memory of white geese under the great plane trees on the jewel-green lawn appeared, like a double exposure, my bespectacled self, in mackintosh and oxfords, on a cold drizzling English June day, coming across the bridge into Baker Street in such an agony of loneliness that I can recall it in my memory like an event; I remember I stood a moment to diagnose the cause and felt my feet wet and knew I hadn't a six-pence left for my gas meter.

America, the natural recipient of stateless desolation, it will have to be. It is here and now that the wonderfully chilled Lore of *Other People's Houses* begins the thaw that, twenty-one years later, will release the unmatched vibrancy of *Her First American*.

Twenty-two-year-old Ilka Weissnix, a refugee from Hitler's Europe living in New York's "Washingstein Heights," takes a trip west, gets off the train in Cowtown, Nevada ("I have believed I am being in Utah, isn't it?") and meets Carter Bayoux (on his way East) in a bar beside the railroad. He is big, he is middle-aged, he is hard-drinking, he is black. Ilka tells Carter that she is looking for the real America. New York is not the real America; there she only meets other refugees. You, she announces triumphantly, are "my first real American." Carter looks at her and replies drily, "Of the second class." What means second class, please? Ilka wants to know. The rest of the book is about how Ilka herself becomes an American as she learns, over the course of a two-year affair with Carter, what means second class please.

Carter Bayoux is one of the great creations in American literature. A black intellectual of the 1950s—journalist, teacher, writer, former adviser to the UN on race relations—he knows "everyone" yet is terminally alone, his spirit howling in the wilderness, doggedly drinking himself to death while begging whatever sympathetic woman comes along to hang in there with him while he destroys himself. Eager, poetic, on the brink, sole survivor Ilka becomes the designated caretaker during one of Carter's last attempts to pull himself out of the void. He, in turn, as they tumble about together, gives her the education of her life, letting her experience New York, the world and herself—as he does.

In the bar beside the railroad station Carter tells Ilka he's going to teach her how to smoke and drink, and she tells him he doesn't look like a teacher. What exactly do I look like? he asks. Ilka shakes her head; she cannot find the words in English:

> She meant that she did not recognize his hair, and that the size of his mouth and his laughter did not go with the urbane way he bent his wrist and crossed his ankles; that the luxurious tweed of his jacket contradicted his flattened nose with its small outgrowth of wild flesh at the bridge, which intimated to the girl disastrous chances, moving accidents his youth had suffered.

Later, they take a walk through the garish streets of Cowtown. Passing Harry's Hash and the Steak and Swill, Ilka asks Carter what sort of men these are whom she sees drinking inside. "Good enough fellows," he tells her, " as fellows go—care for their kids, satisfy their wives some of the time, do their work as well as can be expected, and pay their taxes, mostly, go to church, or not, and will string me up as soon as look at me." What means "string you?" she is thinking, but what she says is, "I believe you have conjured this all, isn't it?"

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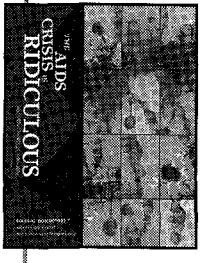

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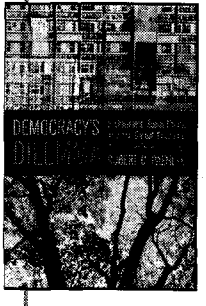

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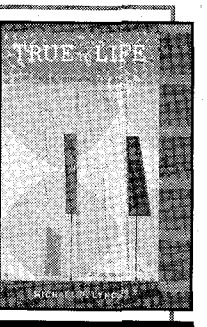

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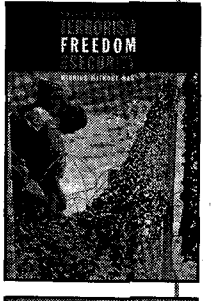

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"I have conjured," said the big American, looking at her. Then he looked deliberately across the street and back at Ilka and said, "You and I stand here, side by side, but I don't know what the hell you're seeing."

"That *is* it, which I have been meaning," said Ilka with a sensation of bliss. She came, afterward, to identify this as the moment in which she had fallen in love; it coincided with a break in the traffic and the man's first, slightest touch, under her elbow.

Back in New York Carter settles into the Bloomsbury Arms (read: Chelsea Hotel), and he and Ilka start the series of mangled dinner dates, disastrous parties, disheveled outings and emergency rescue calls that become their relationship, throughout which Carter sends the bellboy for bourbon, Ilka tries to make him stop drinking and their conversation mounts in a kind of intelligent hilarity that, for the reader, is pure joy.

Two of the brilliant ingredients Segal throws in to enrich the situation even further are the reappearance of Ilka's DP mother whose crazed behavior Carter understands to perfection, and the introduction of a group of Carter's oldest friends, black and white ex-Communists who provide Ilka with the excitement of seeing herself in a bad light. Among these people is a couple who seem ill matched in every way.

"Why would Doris Mae marry..." Ilka starts to ask Carter, and stops.

"A Negro twice her age?"

"*You* think *I* mean *that*?" cried Ilka.

"What *did* you mean?"

"*That!*" said Ilka with a thrill of revelation. "I'm a racist!"

"Not to worry," said Carter. "Some of my best friends are racists."

This conversation echoes another one in which Carter tells Ilka that when Uptown moves to Washingstein Heights, she will move out. Everyone does. She thinks this over and insists that she will not.

"You will move," said Carter.

"I will not move," said Ilka.

"You will be the last to move," said Carter, "but you will move."

By the same token, he predicts that sooner or later she will leave him; she will have to. No, Ilka insists, she will not. You will, he mourns. Everyone does. You'll be the last to go, but you will go.

And indeed, within the year she sees what he sees—and feels what he feels:

Carter's door stood ajar. Carter slept with his face to the wall. Ilka made a pass at cleaning up, but there was something ferocious about the mess of soiled clothing, bottles, papers, wires. It came to Ilka—and not for the first time—that she must disengage herself, and the prospect produced a familiar blackness of pain, as if a hand had thrust into her gut and emptied her out.

Exactly 10-year-old Lore's reaction, upon being told that she must leave her parents if she was to survive—and exactly what Carter feels all the time.

It was a stroke of genius on Lore Segal's part to see in the character of Carter Bayoux the mirror image that would allow Ilka Weissnix to Americanize her outsiderness. Carter's savvy is so elegant, so original, so bottomless that, exposed to it long enough, Ilka is bound to realize, "Oh, now I see how it is done."

It is not so much that Carter himself deepens (he simply accumulates); it is his situation that deepens; and as it does, Ilka's clarifies. Carter in America is sufficiently similar to the Jew in Hitler's Europe that she comes to see herself in him. It's this necessary reversal that supplies the book its radiance. The objective correlative to Ilka's growing illumination is the exactly right, real and convincing way in which her English improves in response to Carter's conversation. As Ilka takes into herself the experience of Carter Bayoux, letting her knowledge of him reshape her, it becomes the key element to how the American language now lives in her. The immigrant experience is completed. ■

Patriot Acts

MIKE MARQUSEE

In September 1950, four months into the Korean War, Congress passed the draconian Internal Security Act (ISA), known as the McCarran Act, after its sponsor, the Nevada Democratic Senator Pat McCarran, a son of immigrants who hated immigrants. The act required all members of the Communist Party and all Communist "front" organizations to register with the government, deprived "subversives" of their right to passports and to government employment and subjected aliens deemed "subversive" to exclusion or deportation. Most notoriously, it granted the President emergency powers to intern "potential subversives" in concentration camps.

This "preventive detention" provision, which remained on the statute books for twenty years, had not featured in McCarran's original bill. Its authors were, in fact, McCarran's liberal opponents—including Hubert Humphrey—who had hoped to sabotage the bill by offering an alternative that was even tougher on Communism. Alas, the alternative ended up as an addition. After Truman vetoed the bill, Humphrey found himself arguing in the Senate in support of the veto on the grounds that the bill was wrong to guarantee the right of habeas corpus to the "despicable traitors" who would be interned in the camps.

The ISA was perhaps the worst legislative excrescence of McCarthyism, though Senator Joe McCarthy had nothing to do

Mike Marqusee is the author, most recently, of Chimes of Freedom: The Politics of Bob Dylan's Art *(New Press).*

BOOKS DISCUSSED IN THIS ESSAY:

WASHINGTON GONE CRAZY: Senator Pat McCarran and the Great American Communist Hunt.
By Michael J. Ybarra.
Steerforth. 854 pp. $35.

REDS: McCarthyism in Twentieth Century America.
By Ted Morgan.
Random House. 685 pp. Paper $16.95.

TREASONABLE DOUBT: The Harry Dexter White Spy Case.
By R. Bruce Craig.
Kansas. 436 pp. $34.95.

ALGER HISS'S LOOKING GLASS WARS: The Covert Life of a Soviet Spy.
By G. Edward White.
Oxford. 297 pp. $30.

DEADLY FARCE: Harvey Matusow and the Informer System in the McCarthy Era.
By Robert M. Lichtman and Ronald D. Cohen.
Illinois. 227 pp. $27.

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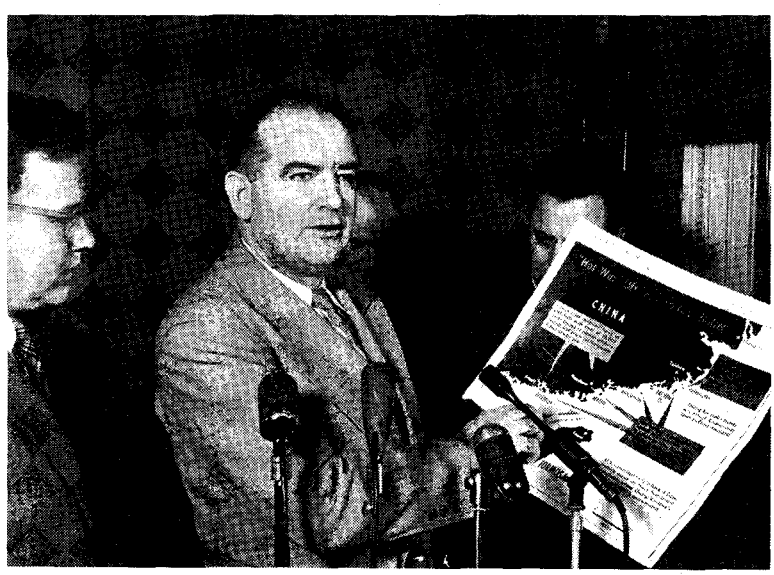
with it. The wave of domestic repression of the late 1940s and early '50s that bears his name—also referred to as the Red Scare, the blacklist, the witch hunt, the cold war purge—was, of course, the work of an array of social forces, not a single individual. Nonetheless, if it is to be called after an individual, McCarran's claim is stronger than McCarthy's.

Pat McCarran was one of the great monsters of American public life. Though he started out as a Western populist and was elected to the Senate on FDR's coattails in 1932, he broke with the New Deal and became one of Roosevelt's chief Congressional tormentors. He hated Jews as well as Communists, and later described the new UN headquarters in New York as "a vantage ground for the infiltration of the United States." Thanks to the seniority system, and what Michael Ybarra describes as his "uncommon parliamentary skill, great tenacity and utter ruthlessness," McCarran acquired vast power in Washington and "ran a virtual government in opposition, even while his own party controlled the White House and both wings of the capital." He bullied the departments of Justice and State, created the racist and restrictive McCarran-Walter immigration act, and as chair of the Senate Internal Security Subcommittee (SISS) presided as the nation's grand inquisitor, hounding unions, intellectuals and federal employees, provoking fear, firings, deportations and suicides. He was despotic, vindictive, corrupt and mendacious—and fully merits the thorough treatment he receives in Ybarra's book, where he is used as a linchpin for a synoptic account of "the great American Communist hunt."



©ED CLARK/GETTY IMAGES, 1955

Senator Joseph McCarthy in 1955

The canvas Ybarra paints in *Washington Gone Crazy* has both the scale and detail demanded by the subject, but he works too hard at making his tome readable. The racy journalese descends into cliché and the novelistic touches undermine the narrative's credibility. ("The switchboard at the *Daily Worker* lit up like a Christmas tree," "the sight of the flag never failed to move him," "Pat McCarran picked up the phone. Jim Farley was on the other end.")

However, as a work of scholarship it is far superior to Ted Morgan's cartoonlike account, which makes only three fleeting references to McCarran. Throughout, *Reds* is shaped by a bizarrely arbitrary selection of sources and by astounding jumps from the anecdotal to the epochal.

For an ostensibly liberal critique of McCarthyism, Morgan's book is curiously indulgent toward some of its most noxious avatars. Martin Dies, first chairman of the House Un-American Activities Committee, is described as a "simplistic but dogged ideologue" who "turned out to be surprisingly effective in uncovering the concealed activities of the party" and "created an instant awareness that the danger of communist subversion was real" in 1938, when he investigated the CIO. As Morgan's own account makes clear, Dies was a shameless white supremacist who used his committee to harass low-ranking federal government functionaries, provide a platform for semi-fascist cranks and mount sweeping attacks on the labor movement and the New Deal.

Although Morgan condemns McCarthy's scattershot accusations, he often replicates his method, repeatedly eliding the categories of Communist Party member and Soviet agent, casually sweeping individuals into the suspect camp. He is harsh on "the posturing cardboard heroes who took the Fifth...cowards afraid of admitting their allegiance," while those who "named names...were doing their duty as citizens under oath." His is an eerie form of liberalism, one that glibly endorses state inquisitions into the political opinions and personal associations of individuals.

In his verdict that McCarthyism was an "exaggerated reaction to a real threat," Morgan shares common ground with Ybarra, who argues that "the Communist party presented a unique challenge to American liberty.... Anti-Communism, then, was both a rational and necessary response. Anti-Communism run amok was something altogether different." But where does "anti-Communism" end and "anti-Communism run amok" begin? Who draws the boundaries of "American liberty"? How was the Communist Party "unique" in its challenge to this system? Surely J. Edgar Hoover's reign at the FBI mounted a more sustained and substantial challenge to human rights in the United States than anything the American Communist Party was responsible for. And the Constitution, which is held up as a repository of "American liberty," is also the document that handed disproportionate and unaccountable power to the likes of McCarran, who sat in the Senate for twenty-two years without ever winning more than 36,000 votes in an election.

Like others, Ybarra and Morgan treat the Venona transcripts published in the 1990s—decryptions of secret communications between Soviet officials and their agents in the United States—as a watershed, belated and conclusive proof that Communists were engaged in an illicit and treasonous conspiracy. Venona is also held to confirm the guilt of Alger Hiss and Harry Dexter White, two eminent New Deal liberals accused of spying for the Soviet Union. As *Treasonable Doubt*, R. Bruce Craig's careful study of the White case, makes clear, the initial attack on the two men was very much an attempt to roll back the "American internationalism" that had gained influence in government during the Roosevelt years. At the Treasury Department, White played a key role in the establishment of the IMF and World Bank, while Hiss at State was closely involved in the launch of the UN—institutions reviled by the American right of the era as alien encroachments on US sovereignty. Neither Hiss nor White was, remotely, a Marxist revolutionary; both were liberal elitists and believers in active US participation in multilateral institutions. Though sympathetic to the USSR, they were even more committed to a peaceful postwar order built on US-USSR cooperation—a commitment that may have led them to pass on confidential information to Soviet agents.

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The Hiss and White cases were infamous mood-setters, used to bolster the claim that liberals had presided over "twenty years of treason." As Craig's book makes clear, the central charge against White—that he subverted US government policy in the interests of the Soviets—is contradicted by his record in office. As for Hiss, not even the harshest interpretation of the Venona evidence justifies the elaborate edifice that G. Edward White constructs in *Alger Hiss's Looking Glass Wars*: a double life postulated in great detail and an inner life analyzed as if the subject were on the dissection table. Speculation here turns casually into assertion and assertion into psychobabble.

In contrast, Robert Lichtman and Ronald Cohen have produced in *Deadly Farce* a judicious and nonjudgmental account of one of the now-forgotten celebrities of the era, ex-Communist Harvey Matusow, who achieved notoriety first as a star witness for the government against his former comrades, and then for spectacularly recanting his testimony. Matusow was one of at least eighty-three ex-Communists on the Justice Department payroll in the early 1950s. As Lichtman and Cohen note, "The sheer volume of employee loyalty cases, deportation proceedings, Smith Act prosecutions, SACB [Subversive Activities Control Board] proceedings, and Congressional and state investigative committee hearings created a large market for informers." In the end, this troupe of professional witnesses perjured themselves frequently and flagrantly, and—unlike Hiss, White and others named as spies—did so with impunity. Matusow was a valuable asset to his employers, naming 216 people as party members. He solemnly told McCarran's credulous SISS that the Communist Party planned to infiltrate the Boy Scouts. He was paid by the New York school system to identify Communist teachers. He advised industrialists and columnists and enjoyed the limelight.

It was a period when informers were not only financially rewarded but held up as moral exemplars, and the young Matusow found the lure irresistible. But what he did next was rare. As a result of what seems to have been a genuine fit of conscience, he announced that he had made it all up. The Justice Department then brought a perjury charge against him—not for his original testimony but for his recantation, specifically his claim that prosecutor Roy Cohn had induced him to lie in the Smith Act trials. He was convicted and served three and a half years in prison. Matusow is sometimes mocked as an attention-seeker, but in Lichtman and Cohen's account he emerges as a complex figure, elusive and more symptomatic of the pressure-cooker times than the Washington high-fliers.

Any history of the Red Scare must also include some account of its putative adversary, the Communist Party USA. The party was habitually authoritarian in its internal regime and sectarian in its relations with others. Its strategic lurches—subordinated to Stalin's realpolitik—were crude and frequently opportunistic. It attracted its share of abusive or inadequate personalities. But that is not the whole story. The party was first and foremost a political entity whose existence was tied up with the fluctuations of a wider social movement. Neither Ybarra nor Morgan has any feel for the left as a shifting milieu, for grassroots activism or for the labor movement. They see only hardened party hacks (knaves) or gullible fellow-travelers (fools). Neither makes use of the extensive literature on American Communism produced over the past twenty-five years. Their narrative is not merely incomplete; it's lopsided and misleading. It cannot come to grips with the real social impact of the witch hunt or its lasting legacy.

Ultimately, McCarthyism wasn't about spies or celebrities or grand inquisitors but about factories and offices, schools and libraries.

There is a huge leap between taking a cold-eyed or even hostile view of the Communist Party and embracing "anti-Communism" as an unremitting ideology. But with few exceptions, that was the leap American liberals made in the late 1940s and early '50s. And that is a leap that Ybarra and Morgan hold up for us to admire today. But they can do so only by ignoring a good deal of intervening history. Marxists are rightly urged to face up to their history of appalling errors, but liberals must do the same. As an ideology anti-Communism has as much blood on its hands as any. The Vietnam War stands as a grisly monument to cold war liberalism, to which a string of other crimes could be added: mass murder of leftists in Indonesia, death squads across Latin America, support for the likes of Mobutu in Africa and the Shah in Iran.

Ybarra and Morgan both exalt Truman as a foe of intolerance, a bulwark against the right. But as Ybarra recounts McCarran's repeated victories over the White House, it becomes clear that the liberals' blunder in introducing the concentration camp clause was not unique. Their strategy of pre-empting the right wing by beating them to the anti-Communist punch proved as great a failure as the CPUSA's protestations that Communism was merely "twentieth-century Americanism."

In 1947 Truman publicly intervened on behalf of the right wing in the civil war in Greece (and helped establish a military dictatorship there). This critical escalation of the cold war witnessed the forging of the postwar bipartisan foreign policy consensus—a consensus that was not merely anti-Soviet but pro–military intervention wherever US interests were seen to be under threat. That same year Truman issued Executive Order 9835, under which more than 2 million federal employees were made subject to loyalty checks. His Justice Department compiled official lists of subversive organizations and "fronts" and prosecuted Communist leaders under the Smith Act. These leaders were jailed in the end not for espionage but for a thought crime: They were proven guilty of formally adhering to Marx and Lenin, who did indeed preach the overthrow of the bourgeois state. All this before the rise of Joe McCarthy—indeed, before the "loss" of China, the Soviet blockade of Berlin or the Communist coup in Czechoslovakia.

By colluding in the transformation of "socialism" into a dirty word, the liberals set a trap for themselves—and helped create the political culture in which "liberal" itself became a dirty word. They handed the right a devastatingly flexible ideological trump card: "Americanism," a means to delegitimize radical, nonconformist and especially avowedly internationalist ideas.

The "excesses" of McCarthyism were eventually curbed, but its assumptions remained in place. By world standards, the cold war purge was nonlethal (compare Indonesia or Chile). Nonetheless, the damage was profound, and much of it has still not been undone. Ultimately, McCarthyism wasn't about spies or celebrities or even grand inquisitors. It was about factories and offices, schools, local libraries. PTAs. Radio stations. Comic books. TV series. Advertisements.

In the labor movement the purge led to mass expulsions, splits, internecine battles and a historic depoliticization from which US unions never fully recovered. State and local governments subjected 80 percent of the country's 1 million public school teachers to some form of loyalty screening. Nationalist paranoia and superpower preroga-

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tives merged, with long-term consequences for US political culture. McCarthyism's defining legacy was not its procedural abuses (grotesque though these were) but the foreclosure of radical options in general. Any politics that did not genuflect before the idol of American exceptionalism was demonized. The divergence of the US polity from its European counterparts was deepened and the center of gravity pushed to the right. That's why the label "McCarthyism" is worse than a casual misnomer. It's a misrepresentation and an evasion.

Ybarra and Morgan largely ignore the intertwined economic and international dimensions of the witch hunt. It was as much the revenge of big business on organized labor as it was of the right wing on the New Deal, and it unfolded against the background of anticolonial struggles in Indochina, Indonesia, the Philippines and West Africa, in many of which US corporate interests had a major stake. The cold war purge and the consensus it bred led to the establishment and acceptance of huge peacetime military expenditures. It also insured that there was barely a whisper of domestic dissent when the United States helped overthrow the non-Communist, nationalist regimes of Mossadegh in Iran in 1953 and Arbenz in Guatemala in 1954, and when it invaded Lebanon in 1958.

While Ybarra and Morgan are keenly aware that the "protection of American liberty" has served as a pretext for fierce attacks on freedom in America, they are much less alert to its role as a pretext for the mass destruction of liberty and life overseas. Long before the rise of the neocons, cold war liberalism had brought the United States into disrepute across several continents.

The Red Scare consolidated American popular support for what was, in reality, a burgeoning empire, though then as now it refused to call itself that. In the "war on terror," as in the Red Scare, an international conspiracy whose agents are said to be in our midst has been posited as the national nemesis. Once again America is depicted as under siege from both without and within. This time around, the public has proved more resistant and dissent more resilient. Nonetheless, like their cold war forebears, liberal opponents of the "excesses" of the war on terror often accept the bulk of its premises—not least America's assumed right to invade and occupy foreign lands.

For Ybarra and Morgan, 1954 marks the end of the era of darkness. McCarran died and McCarthy was censured by his Senate colleagues. That year, independent journalist I.F. Stone (referred to by Morgan, preposterously, as "the pro-Soviet Washington correspondent") warned that it would take more than the fall of one extremist to put an end to the witch hunt: "It is sometimes hard to draw a line of principles between McCarthy and his critics. If there is indeed a monstrous and diabolic conspiracy against world peace and stability, then isn't McCarthy right?... How talk of fair procedure with a protean and Satanic enemy?... McCarthy is personally discomfited but McCarthyism is still on the march...to acquiesce in the delusions which create a panic is no way to stem it." ■

Imitation of Life

LEE SIEGEL

THE COMPLETE SHORT NOVELS.
By Anton Chekhov. Translated by Richard Pevear and Larissa Volokhonsky. Everyman's Library. 548 pp. $23.

To return to Chekhov in this cultural moment makes you feel as if you were experiencing spring in Russia. His meticulously crafted fiction and plays seem absolutely free of artifice, as if telling stories were a natural function of his physical being, like a birdsong, and not a highly disciplined and self-conscious creative-intellectual activity. Yet so much writing about fiction now consists of tiresome debates over realism versus modernism, the nature of consciousness in the novel, character versus caricature, poetic language versus plain language—it is all a kind of analytical birdcage.

During the past forty years, the university has offered refuge to scores of artists and intellectuals and, for some time, an academic style has been flowing back into mainstream literary culture. It boggles the mind that Harold Bloom's impossibly dense and jargony *Zagat*-like guides to the best of the canon, to the greatest geniuses and to the wisest wisdom get defined as great "popular" criticism. Reading Bloom's abstractifying impositions, you start feeling anxious, as though you just realized that the exam was tomorrow and you hadn't begun studying for it. (The influence of anxiety!) The idea of literature as, in Kenneth Burke's phrase, "equipment for living," has just about gone the way of the typewriter.

And suddenly Chekhov's universe appears anew in this beautiful, if sometimes maladroitly translated—by Richard Pevear and Larissa Volokhonsky—new collection of his five short novels: Chekhov's acheful, unsparing eye; his unforgiving yet gentle irony; his characters' dignified pathos and their pathetic attempts to dignify themselves with big theories of how to live in this world; and the writer's uncanny evocation of their self-delusion as simultaneously ludicrous and heartbreaking. About Chekhov, Maxim Gorky wrote, "In the presence of Anton Pavlovich, everyone felt an unconscious desire to be simpler, more truthful, more himself." Reflecting on Chekhov, you find yourself using words like "sadness," and "longing," and "disappointment," and "love," and "kindness," and "hate"—you feel, inexorably, a sudden desire to talk not about literature, not about the conventions and strategies of fiction, but about life itself, as if Chekhov had not so much invented his stories as discovered them in a field, or inside a broken bottle.

"Zhizn zhizn" goes a Russian saying: Life is life. Experience ultimately defeats the most elevated attempts to make sense of it. Art, science, ideas (not to mention debates over realism versus modernism), all go down before the onslaught of time and sensation. An unmediated clarity—the illusion of actual experience unfolding through actual time—characterizes Chekhov's fiction, and also his plays, which revolutionized the theater in the way they stripped the stage of theatricality. Indeed, when the people in Chekhov's plays dream of transforming themselves through devotion to a plan for the betterment of humankind, or through love or travel, they are yearning for the type of dramatic twist that you find in a well-constructed plot. In Chekhov's plays, the promise and salvation of the theater are always waiting, unattainably, just offstage. The honest core of Chekhov's art is the acknowledgment that even art is helpless in the face of life.

Lee Siegel, the television critic for The New Republic, *was the recipient of the 2002 National Magazine Award for reviews and criticism.*

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Relaxation therapy for your feet

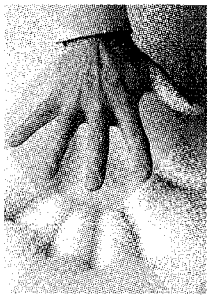
Visco-elastic foam has changed the way people sleep, now it helps the way you walk.

by Leigh Ligon

My feet hurt! How many times have you heard *or* said that...standing in line at the grocery store or simply while doing daily routine tasks? I feel like the older I get the more my feet ache. I've tried elevating my feet, soaking them in hot water and expensive massage therapy—but to no avail. That's why I'm so excited to tell you about my recent discovery—CLOUD 10 Slippers!

How did a NASA invention save my feet? From the moment I slipped them on, they molded to the shape of my feet like I had a custom fit pair of slippers made especially for me! The slipper's insole is made from visco-elastic memory foam originally created by NASA. This foam equalizes pressure, reduces stress and tension and provides incredible comfort.

According to the American Podiatric Medical Association, as people age, their feet tend to spread, and lose the fatty pads that cushion the bottom of the feet. Additional weight can affect the bone and ligament structure. These slippers mold to the contours of my feet through my body's heat and weight, literally cushioning every single step I take.



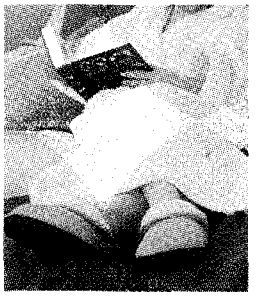
Technologically advanced slippers mold to the contours of your feet making each step feel like you're walking on Cloud 10!

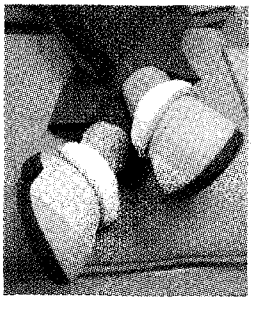
Did you know that the average person takes 8,000 to 10,000 steps a day, which adds up to about 115,000 miles over a lifetime? That's enough to go around the circumference of the earth four times. No wonder we all have tired, aching feet.

I've heard about similar kinds of slippers, but I couldn't afford to spend nearly $70 a pair. The Cloud 10 Slippers were a much better fit for my budget. The outer material of these stylish slippers is beautiful tan faux suede and they feature a cozy, fleece-lined interior and collar to provide added warmth. The durable rubber sole is perfect for my quick trips outdoors to grab the morning paper.

❖ *Inner sole is constructed from visco-elastic memory foam*
❖ *Body heat molds foam to cushion feet for maximum support*
❖ *Super-soft, fleece lining provides added warmth*
❖ *Durable rubber sole—perfect for quick outdoor trips!*

If you have arthritic feet like I do, you suffer from inflammation and pain in your joints. Our feet have to last a lifetime and I've decided to stop neglecting the part of my body that keeps me mobile.





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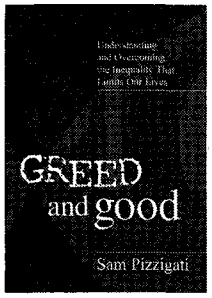

Greed and Good
Understanding and Overcoming the Inequality That Limits Our Lives

Sam Pizzigati
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More info at www.greedandgood.org

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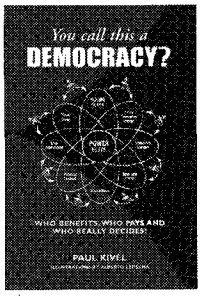

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Chekhov wrote *The Steppe*, appropriately the first tale in this volume, when he was 28, and it is a kind of manifesto of Chekhovian lifelikeness. A fatherless 9-year-old boy named Egorushka is taken by his uncle, a wealthy merchant, and a rich priest on a long journey far from Egorushka's mother and home, the purpose of which is to enroll the boy in school and thus give him a good start in life. At one point, realizing that they have to make a side trip, his guardians arrange to meet Egorushka later and leave him with a group of peasants who are part of a caravan bringing merchandise to market.

Throughout the trip, Egorushka animates the stark landscape with his own emotions: Trees, grass, sky, wildlife are "transfixed with anguish," and then bursting with a "passionate thirst for life," and then "lonely," and "anguished, hopeless" once again. His perceptions of the people he encounters also shift as his moods shift, and as the people themselves shed appearances. Fearful, obsequious Jews are, a minute later, defiant, mocking Jews. A countess is worldly-seeming and enchanting one minute, and the naïve dupe of a rogue the next—and so forth. The qualities of life that Egorushka witnesses on his journey are equally unstable. They run the gamut from callousness and cruelty to kindness and sorrow, with contrasting qualities often converging in the same incident or person. By the end of his odyssey, Egorushka has nearly died from pneumonia, as senseless an experience as death, or a brush with death, always is. When he is momentarily reunited with his uncle and the friendly priest, the latter takes him aside:

> Well, how was the journey *puer bone* [my good boy]?... Sick of it, I suppose.... You go on and on, Lord forgive me, you look ahead, and the steppe still stretches out as continuously as before: there's no end of it to be seen! That's not traveling, it's sheer punishment.

After Egorushka is left alone by his guardians with a kind friend of the family, whom Egorushka has never met before, he wonders about this new embarkation into the future: "What sort of life would it be?" That is the story's final line, and it is the gentle war cry of Chekhovian irony. The shifting meanings, the uncertainty and instability, the dependence of his perception on his state of mind, the incalculable ratio of appearance to reality, the senselessness of affliction—Egorushka's journey has in fact been life itself: "You go on and on... you look ahead, and the steppe still stretches out as continuously as before: there's no end of it to be seen!" His own, private, untransmittable experience of life is, and will always be, the only truthful description of life that he will ever know. Somehow, Chekhov's art manages to transmit the untransmittable.

Such lifelikeness makes it difficult to talk about Chekhov in a critical way. What makes his stories poetic is precisely their freedom from the "literary." Like an actual incident, Chekhov's mastery passes too fast to catch and explain. One of the many gifts of this collection is that the novellas reveal more about Chekhov's art than do his fleeting short stories. Strictly speaking, they are not novellas at all, but short tales that go on for longer than usual. They are expanding compressions; they deepen rather than progress. And therein lie their little windows onto Chekhov's art. The highly wrought details in the short stories that occur too briefly to be rationally apprehended unwind more lengthily in the short novels. Yet these aren't lapses in storytelling. They're tangible wonders.

What would be a detachable symbol or leitmotif in another writer remains, in Chekhov, embedded in his characters' lives as a concrete part of their experience. Consider the parasol in *Three Years*, one of the lesser-known of Chekhov's works. Laptev, member of a rich merchant family and a colorless, anxious, passive, yet kind and decent man, falls wildly in love with a doctor's daughter, Yulia Sergeevna. Yulia's father is treating Nina, Laptev's dying sister, and Yulia often comes to visit Nina, who is also Yulia's friend. One day she leaves her parasol behind.

> At home, [Laptev] saw Yulia Sergeevna's forgotten parasol on a chair, seized it, and greedily kissed it. The parasol was of silk, no longer new, held by an elastic band; the handle was of simple, cheap white bone. Laptev opened it and held it over him, and it seemed to him that there was even a smell of happiness around him.

Laptev opens his souvenir and sits giddily under it. The next day, clutching the parasol, he rushes to Yulia's house, begs her to let him keep it, and then with innocent, crude impulsiveness asks her to marry him. Astounded and confused, she turns him down. Laptev is devastated. Yulia begins to think about his offer, however, and concludes that there was no reason "to refuse a decent, kind, loving man only because she did not like him." (Chekhov's irony

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always resolves itself into a poignancy. A negative becomes a positive in mid-laugh: You suddenly see what Yulia means.) She was getting old, no other opportunities presented themselves and Laptev could change her life for the better. She decides to marry him, even though "to marry him would mean saying good-bye forever to her dreams, her notions of happiness and married life."

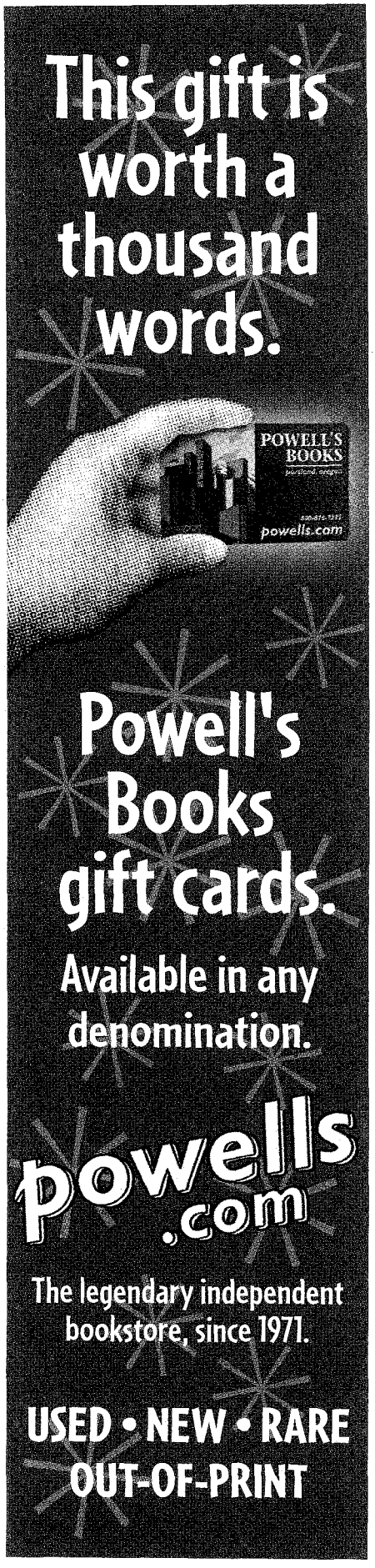
There is much discussion in *Three Years* of happiness and love. Embittered by their union, Laptev and Yulia each come to believe that both are impossible. They drift through the months and the years into despair. And then they find that they cannot live without each other. They discover that time has woven invisible threads of affinity—not merely habit—between them. They find that they miss each other when they're not together. They want to protect each other. They seem to enjoy each other sexually. They depend on each other's kindness, and—of utmost importance in Chekhov—both of them are bored when the other isn't around. Laptev and Yulia come to realize that "love" does not exist; rather, it consists of the sometimes-present, sometimes-absent experiences—of the other person's kindness, or intelligence, or honesty, or reassuring presence, or wit, or physical chemistry, etc.—that keep two people together, at least until tomorrow. The conventional idea of love that so oppressed Laptev and Yulia is as about as real as Laptev's idealizing of Yulia's parasol into a perfect love.

What is real is the parasol's "simple, cheap white bone," "held by an elastic band." In other words, the only reality is fragile human life: meaningless except for the meanings we deluded and deluding people keep projecting onto it. Toward the end of the story, Laptev brings the parasol to Yulia and tells her that he's abandoned the idea of ever being happy, but that he was happy one time in his life, when he sat all night under her umbrella. This is ironic in at least two ways: He is in fact still striving for happiness with Yulia by attempting to move her with memories of the parasol; and he is unwittingly telling her that on the one occasion in his life when his spirit soared, the source of joy was not Yulia but his fantasy of Yulia. He is still trying to impose meaning on life, still horrified by the blank, neutral slate life is, still trying to delude Yulia and comically deluding himself. The parasol becomes the perfect symbolic center of the story. And yet it never stops being a parasol; it never becomes "literary." It carries meaning for the reader only because it has accrued the very same meaning for the characters. Unlike, say, D.H. Lawrence's famous rocking horse, the parasol is not a privileged communiqué over the characters' heads between the reader and the writer. It belongs to the characters.

For all of his attempts to win happiness for himself, Laptev comes to the same realization as Yulia, aptly summarized by the protagonist of the masterpiece *My Life*: "how sad it is to live in the world." In the same way as Chekhov's art achieves the illusion of capturing experience unmediated by art, Chekhov's heroes and heroines learn to live without the mediations of big plans, great loves, large ideas. It is not, Chekhov means to say, that life is consistently sad. It is that every life, no matter how abundant its joys, is ultimately sad.

My Life, a sort of *shlemiel* story, has its protagonist, Misail, reaching his rueful conclusion after trying to live as authentically as he can. He spurns his rich, brutal father, rejects his high social class, marries for what he thinks is love, cares for his emotionally wounded sister. He shears the mediations off life and pares existence down to its simple white bone. At the end, he is outcast and bereft. We last see him alone, his now-deceased sister's young daughter his only companion. Orphans or near-orphans abound in Chekhov. The hero of the bizarre *Story of an Unknown Man*, a political spy named Vladimir Ivanych, who falls in love with his quarry's abandoned mistress, ends up taking care of her little girl after the mother dies in childbirth. It's as if these parentless children came into life already prepared for the fact that, as Laptev puts it, "there were no firm, lasting attachments." Their future lies in their beginning; they are pre-saddened. And yet these orphans are luckier than nearly all the heroes of the novellas, who have been physically abused, like Chekhov himself, by their fathers. If orphanhood is a pre-sadness, for Chekhov it is also a state of grace.

But although Chekhov's world exists on the tide of persistent, gentle melancholy, it is far from a bleak place. "Life is given only once," says Vladimir Ivanych, speaking for all of Chekhov's protagonists, "and one would like to live it cheerfully, meaningfully, beautifully." The best of Chekhov's people surrender their illusions and try to endure life's inherent limitations and disappointments. And for this sober honesty they are rewarded with a substitute for the cushioning mediations that they've given up. They learn to forgive themselves



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and to forgive other people; they learn to be kind. "Kindness" is a word that occurs over and over again in Chekhov. It is a mode of being rather than a big idea about how to live, a quality of experience rather than a mediation of experience. It is cheer, meaning and beauty self-created from within.

Kindness and irony blend indistinguishably at the end of the magnificent novella *The Duel*. Superficially, the duel of the title is between the ideas of a ruthless Darwinist named von Koren and an ineffectual humanist named Laevsky, an intellectual combat that ends in an actual duel with pistols. But the real struggle is between Laevsky and his lover, Nadezhda; and even more than that, between each one's perception of the other and the actual other. Laevsky has grown tired of Nadezhda. Stifled, bored, constantly irritated, he makes plans to leave her, but feelings of guilt and pity keep him stewing in misery by her side. What he doesn't know is that Nadezhda, vain and coquettish, has been slowly drifting away from him and impulsively, even innocently, conducting affairs with two other men. She also is mired in pity and guilt.

Like Laptev and Yulia, however, Laevsky suddenly realizes, in a beautifully modulated moment, that Nadezhda is his life. Nadezhda herself discovers that her vanity has brought her further than she wanted to go and placed her in the hands of a brute. When Laevsky catches Nadezhda with the man, the irony of both their positions propels them into a new situation. Shorn of their delusions, they marry and dwell in life's simple white bone, in a gray mist between happiness and unhappiness, borne up by their clemency toward each other, which itself is the product of their understanding of life's tragic limitations.

At the end of the novella, Laevsky and the other characters, all of whom have clashed with each other to some degree, stand at the edge of the sea. They are watching von Koren being rowed out to a ship that is waiting to take him on a zoological expedition. The water is very rough, and soon von Koren's little boat becomes harder and harder to see as it gets tossed about on the waves, yet another irony, since this cold-hearted eugenicist, who seeks to master nature, is now at nature's mercy. Straining to see von Koren, Laevsky thinks

> The boat is thrown back...it makes two steps forward and one step back, but the oarsmen are stubborn, they work the oars tirelessly and do not fear the high waves.... So it is in life.... In search of the truth, people make two steps forward and one step back. Sufferings, mistakes, and the tedium of life throws them back, but the thirst for truth and a stubborn will drive them on and on. And who knows? Maybe they'll row their way to the real truth...

And Laevsky entertains these thoughts while watching and worrying over the safety of von Koren, who would gladly have killed Laevsky in their duel if he hadn't been suddenly distracted. Yet such irony doesn't undermine Laevsky's reflections; it amplifies them into kind comprehension. The entire novella opens out into Chekhov's trademark blend of irony and poignancy. Rather than issue a thunderous Tolstoyan judgment or proclamation or conclusion, which perhaps reminded him of a cruel father's tyranny, Chekhov finishes his tale with the stubborn facticity of the parasol. Its last sentence is: "It began to drizzle." What makes Chekhov so inestimably precious is that he is a writer who lets life have the last word. Which it does anyway. *Zhizn zhizn.* ■

The Good Girl

DEBORAH SCROGGINS

THE DARLING. By Russell Banks. HarperCollins. 391 pp. $25.95.

In the past few decades, Russell Banks has established himself as one of America's most important living writers, one of a handful with the daring and the talent to plumb our history and the human heart for their deepest meanings. For him, the defining story of our epoch is the great clash between Europe and Africa that gave birth to the African diaspora and with it, the New World, in all its tragic majesty and portent for good and evil. It's a story he has explored from many different angles, beginning in 1980 with *The Book of Jamaica*, the tale of a white professor confronting the reality of race in the Caribbean. Since then, he has given us *Continental Drift* (1985), a visionary epic about the catastrophic collision between the lives of a working-class New Englander and a Haitian immigrant, both in search of their own American Dream; *Rule of the Bone* (1995), the story of a teenage drifter who flees America for Jamaica; and *Cloudsplitter* (1998), an examination of the fiery New England abolitionist John Brown and the tangled roots of political violence. In his latest book, *The Darling*, which he has said grew out of his research for *Cloudsplitter*, he takes up the same themes again, this time in the tale of an upper-class American woman who washes up in Liberia, the West African state settled in the nineteenth century by American ex-slaves, while trying to escape her radical past as a member of the Weather Underground in the 1960s.

When we first meet Hannah Musgrave, the book's heroine and narrator, she's a gray-haired, middle-aged organic farmer living in the Adirondacks. We soon learn that she has had another life as a wife and mother in Liberia, and that she's decided to go back there to find out what happened to the three sons and the chimpanzees she abandoned ten years earlier to civil war. Hannah herself is the only child of a famous New England pediatrician (reminiscent in some respects of Dr. Benjamin Spock) who expected her to embody the self-denying ethos of his family's Puritan forebears, not to mention the high-achieving results of his own liberal prescriptions for child-rearing. During the Vietnam era, he and her mother looked on with fond admiration even as she pursued an increasingly radical path that landed her on the FBI's Most Wanted list. They saw her as a modern incarnation of the abolitionists, who they believe struck down the evil of slavery and, in so doing, saved the Republic. In fact, as Hannah herself recognizes, she is a monster of selfishness who uses a series of largely illusory crusades as a very American excuse for self-regard.

Bored and unhappy as a young woman trying to live up to her parents' heroic ex-

Deborah Scroggins, a former editor and correspondent for the Atlanta Journal and Constitution, *is the author of* Emma's War: An Aid Worker, a Warlord, Radical Islam, and the Politics of Oil—A True Story of Love and Death in Sudan *(Anchor), which won a 2003 Ron Ridenhour Award for Truth-Telling. She lives in Atlanta.*

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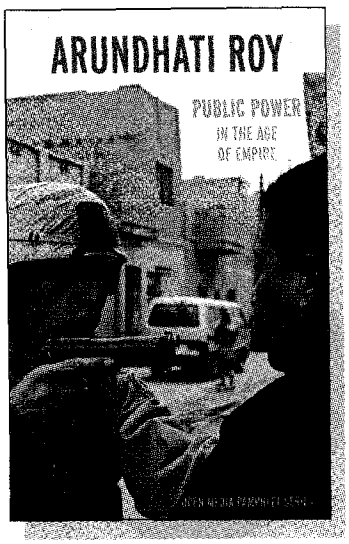
PUBLIC POWER IN THE AGE OF EMPIRE
Arundhati Roy



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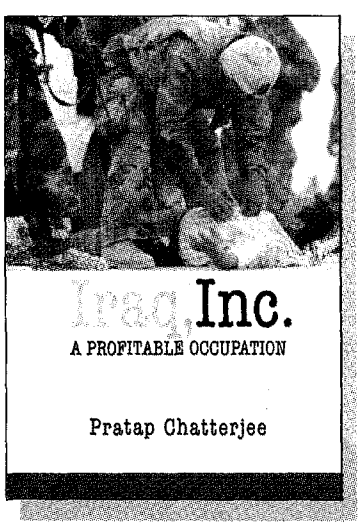

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pectations (while at the same time excoriating what she sees as their complacent liberalism), she seizes an opportunity to escape underground life in New Bedford, Massachusetts, by running away to Ghana with a fellow radical. Once there, she drifts on to the fetid and decaying Liberia of the 1970s, where she meets and marries Woodrow Sundiata, the country's assistant minister of public health. She bears Woodrow three sons before discovering her true calling as a caretaker for the neglected and abandoned chimpanzees that Liberians consider "bush meat." At the same time, she and Woodrow are drawn into an increasingly dangerous alliance with Charles Taylor, a cunning and ambitious politician whose plans to take over Liberia's government are secretly backed by the CIA.

What Hannah really wants seems to be a quiet life alone with her animal friends, but, driven by the belief her parents have instilled in her that it is her duty and destiny to change the world, she can't act on her desires until it is too late. Instead, she meddles in matters she doesn't begin to understand, helping to plunge not just her family but the whole of Liberia into a hellish war. Only after her husband has been slaughtered in front of her eyes and her sons turned into cannibals and child soldiers is she willing to face the consequences of her actions and, even then, only obliquely and from the safety of her organic haven—a haven denied to the hapless Liberian victims of her psychodramas.

This, then, is yet another dark fable of American pseudo-innocence lost, and Banks is such a master storyteller, and has thought so deeply about the issues of race and power at hand, that there is much to savor here. As always, his portraits of rural and working-class New England life are unsurpassed, as are his depictions of the way the personal and the political push and pull against each other to shape human character. Take, for example, the description he gives early in the book of Hannah decapitating the free-range chickens she raises on her Adirondacks farm. She could delegate the task to an employee, but, being Hannah, she's too proud for that. Wrenching as it is to kill, she says, "it feels somehow just and necessary that I do it myself." Besides, she has a political rationale that makes it all right: "It's me and Anthea and the girls against Tyson's and Frank Perdue and the industrialization of the food chain, and for us it justifies the carnage and the stress and high feelings that the bimonthly killing arouses in us.... We're doing it, by God, for a *reason*. It's *political*."

This is an appropriately ominous introduction to the other kinds of killing Hannah has been willing to sanction so long as it's done for an appropriately political reason. In Liberia she shies away from eating "bush meat" at the village home of her future husband's family, feeling that chimpanzees are too close to humans to be consumed. But when the chance comes for her to free the diabolical Charles Taylor from prison, she doesn't hesitate to set him off to start a war she knows will consume thousands of human Liberians. Although a sexual attraction to Taylor may be her deepest motive for doing it, she tells herself that his will be a war of liberation against Samuel Doe, the dictator who has banished her back to the United States.

Charles Taylor is, of course, a real Liberian ex-warlord and ex-president as well as a fictional character, and much of the book's power comes from Banks's telling of the buildup to his murderous rule. As a metaphor for America's involvement in Africa, the self-absorbed Hannah works well. Like the New England abolitionists who created Liberia to get rid of the freed slaves who were beginning to congregate in Northern American cities, Hannah frequently supposes that her intentions

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are altruistic, when in fact she's only trying to exorcise demons of her own. Like America, most of what she does in Africa is designed not so much to accomplish anything as to impress a domestic audience—in her case, her parents. Like America, she enjoys the benefits of the very same Liberian corruption that she complacently condemns. And like America, when the going gets tough, she walks away from the disasters she helps create. As she concludes at the end, "In the new history of America, mine was merely the story of an American darling, and had been from the beginning."

Unfortunately, Hannah is more believable as a metaphor for America than as a living, breathing American woman. That's not just because she's unlikable, although she is very unlikable indeed. To my mind, it's because there's something essentially false about the way that Banks presents her, so that somehow none of her relationships ring true. In the famous story by Chekhov from which the title is taken, a provincial Russian woman takes on one identity after another according to the men in her life. The constant, however, is a need for love and companionship so deep that the woman is willing to cast off every other aspect of personality in pursuit of it. Hannah, too, is a shape-changer, but the conflict with her parents that we are given as a motive hardly seems sufficient to account for her gyrations. A Brandeis graduate so fired by anger over racial injustice that she drops out of Harvard Medical School to join the Weather Underground, she suddenly loses all interest in politics after moving to Africa—a continent whose obscene unfairness is guaranteed to jolt the most politically inert. Instead, she quickly settles into Liberia's faux-Southern plantation society as the bourgeois wife of a deacon of the United Methodist Church. Something is wrong with this picture.

Love might be an explanation, but, as she repeatedly tells us, Hannah is incapable of love. Like her absurdly clichéd mother and father, she is said to be the product of generations of frozen, upper-class parenting. She describes her lovemaking with Woodrow as "chilled, methodical, obligatory and, even when slow and drawn out, brutal." Nevertheless this alleged feminist and socialist would rather submit to nightly rape than admit to her parents that she made a mistake. Nor can she feel much for her children. Looking deep into her sons' eyes, she sees only her own reflection, and even when she goes back to Liberia, she admits that she is more drawn by her missing chimps than by her sons. "I was not a natural mother," she says, and for once we believe her. Her impulse to political action revives when she's unexpectedly exiled from this happy home to the United States, resulting in her sudden decision to spring Taylor from prison. But since she's never before expressed the slightest interest in Liberian politics, and Taylor makes no serious effort to persuade her that he's up to anything except gaining power for himself, we don't really understand why.

Liberia and Liberians, so vivid and full of mystery and surprise in real life, are a curiously pallid lot here. The funhouse aspect of the country that instantly strikes most American visitors is absent, as are the constant and grinding demands for money that are so much a part of everyday Liberian life. Though Banks gets many things right, lots of little details, like his rendition of Liberia's colorful mock-Southern English, seem artificial and forced.

I was so puzzled and disappointed by the emptiness at what should be the heart of the book that I did a bit of checking. Apparently while Banks has traveled extensively in West Africa, he was never able to visit Liberia. That's a real shame, because he's the kind of rare genius who might have been able to begin to comprehend the reality behind its surreal facade. ■

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Jeffrey Lewis

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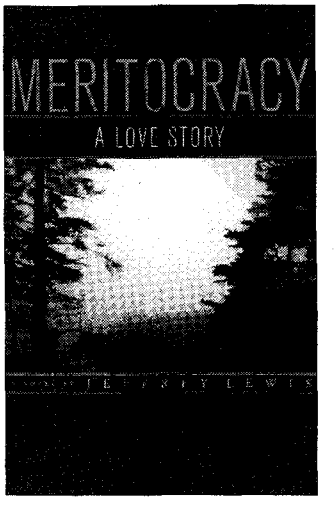

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ESSAY

The Shock of the Old

MORRIS DICKSTEIN

I. B. Singer was a beloved presence on the American literary scene for so long that it was hard to imagine that this centennial, including the publication of his *Collected Stories* in three hefty volumes by the Library of America, would tell us anything new about him. I had been reading his novels and stories all my life, as had so many American writers who envied his almost magical fluency, his unexpected fame and his seemingly bottomless knowledge of Jewish folkways. Besides reading his work, I had been raised in one small corner of his world. As a child, living and going to school on Henry Street, just a block from East Broadway, I had probably passed the *Forward* building a thousand times and eaten in the Garden Cafeteria often enough to have brushed by Singer himself, seated over a cup of coffee and a plate of rice pudding or stewed prunes. I hadn't grown up in Eastern Europe, but I knew the Orthodox world he described like the back of my hand.

Yet when I sat down this summer to look at Singer's work again, I was overcome by an ineffable sense of strangeness, as if, in the years since his death in 1991, he had become a visitor from another planet—a feeling he himself intensely experienced when he landed here in 1935. His world, which already seemed exotic when he first broke upon the literary scene in the 1950s, had now grown unimaginably remote. Not only his dybbuks and demons but the people themselves belonged not simply to another continent but to another cosmos, a distant century. Yet even now, because of his preternaturally sharp memory, graphic fantasy life and huge storytelling skill, they soon became wonderfully immediate, almost leaping off the page. Instead of casually browsing through his work I found myself cascading from book to book, story to story, instantly gripped by whatever he portrayed.

Every reader seems to agree: A Singer story pulls us right in. It never slows down to bathe us in atmosphere or pauses to analyze the characters' motives and feelings. It unfolds in swift strokes, like flashes of lightning. In their speed and narrative economy, in their rich oral quality, his stories remind us of folk tales or legends, seemingly conventional yet daringly heterodox, and crafted by a cunning verbal artist. They're relentlessly driven less by plot than by Singer's almost prurient fascination with the oddities of human behavior. By some peculiar paradox, he seems at once the most traditional and the most modern of twentieth-century writers.

Singer's childhood and youth were split between small Hasidic towns in Poland like Bilgoray, where a centuries-old way of life had changed little, and the bustling city of Warsaw, where this shy, dreamy son of a rabbi could see con men and fallen women rub shoulders with yeshiva *buchers*; could hear his older brother Israel Joshua, a rebel and rationalist, arguing with his deeply pious father; and could eavesdrop on his father's rabbinical court, where it seemed that every human conflict and desire was acted out on a daily basis. In his father's court Singer first developed his acute interest in human nature, especially the vexed relations between men and women, which would sustain him through the next eight decades. In his father's books, which he read with the same overweening curiosity, he saw how these passions were translated into folklore, legal prohibitions and mystical conjecture about angels and demons, sin and punishment, God, creation and the afterlife. This rush of knowledge, combined with new sexual feelings and metaphysical qualms, turned Singer into a believer who did not believe, someone who saw a design in the universe but—especially after the Holocaust—one that had gone horribly wrong. He began to think of this rich Jewish mythology not as literally true but as a set of profound metaphors, dyed into the spirit of the people, for a world that God had toyed with or abandoned, where lust, cruelty and deceit would always overwhelm reason and progress.

Singer's bleak outlook, so typical of writers between the wars, was soon complicated by his early sense of failure. As his older brother built a remarkable career, finding a vast audience for novels like *The Brothers Ashkenazy* and *Yoshe Kalb*, the younger Singer felt thwarted and overshadowed. Already in the early 1930s, the Yiddish literary scene in Warsaw seemed to him to be a dying world. The work produced felt less than minor: he later described it dismissively as *getlich on a got, veltlich on a velt*—godly without a god, worldly without a world. The shadow of Hitler and Stalin loomed over the Jews of Poland; to an anxious soul like Singer, full of grim foreboding, it looked like the end of the line. But even in America, where Jewish life appeared to be thriving, Yiddish itself seemed mongrelized, half-assimilated, watered down—a language he could not imagine using, in a world he could not imagine writing about.

When we think of the sheer copiousness of his later work—some eighteen novels, ten volumes of stories, fourteen books for children—his deep depression and prolonged writer's block when he first came to America are difficult to fathom. But starting in the mid-1940s, when his revered brother suddenly died and the world he knew had been wiped out, he became its most vital yet most partial witness. Though he argued during the war that the only material for a Yiddish writer lay in the past, in the next decades he even began writing about the American scene as well, at first only for his *Forward* readers. Gradually he developed a direct, anecdotal style that sat surprisingly well in the pages of glossy magazines. The shy rabbi's son, the grasping lover often entangled in a web of impossible relationships, sometimes with three women at one time, the delinquent father who abandoned his 5-year-old son to come to the United States, the young writer so tormented by his failures that he gave up writing fiction and even contemplated suicide, had turned into a grandfatherly elf who charmed interviewers and mesmerized photographers, publishing stories in *The New Yorker*, *Playboy* and *GQ*. By then his widely translated work and canny persona had made him one of the most colorful figures in postwar American writing.

Some of the best of his work can be found in his short fiction, including his signature story "Gimpel the Fool," translated by Saul Bellow, a classic Yiddish *shlemiel* story but also the overture to Singer's many tales about the perverse, unpredictable relations between the sexes; "Yentl the Yeshiva Boy," an ingenious, touching

Morris Dickstein is Distinguished Professor of English at the CUNY Graduate Center. His new book, A Mirror in the Roadway: Literature and the Real World, *will be published by Princeton in May. These remarks introduced a centennial tribute to Isaac Bashevis Singer in October at the 92nd Street Y in New York.*

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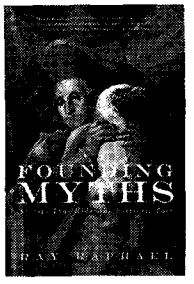

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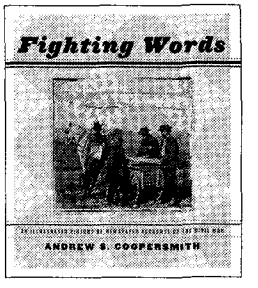

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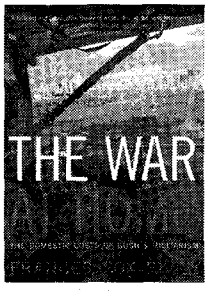

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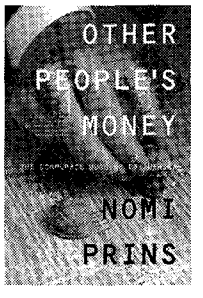

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story about cross-dressing and transgression that has attracted superb actors on stage and screen; and "The Cafeteria," at once his most resonant American story and the most haunting of his Holocaust stories, which invariably deal not with the Shoah itself, which Singer did not experience directly, but with the fate of refugees and survivors whose troubled lives obsess him as much as their own bitter memories haunt them.

Behind the surface simplicity of these stories are overtones that reverberate long after we have read them. Though Singer rarely had a good word for other Yiddish writers, "Gimpel the Fool," the parable that became his breakthrough to an American audience, echoes Y. L. Peretz's famous story "Bontshe Shvayg" (Bontshe the Silent), dealing with one of the holy fools of classic Yiddish literature. Like Bontshe, Gimpel belongs with the insulted and the injured. He too holds his tongue when he is abused, but he is no fool, for he sees more than most people realize. He is rather "Gimpel Tam," as the Yiddish title goes—simple, innocent, unspoiled. Given the chance to divorce his promiscuous wife, who has presented him with many children not his own, he pulls back, for he loves her as much as he adores them. Tempted to take revenge on the whole town that has tricked and degraded him, he leaves instead, turning into a traveling storyteller and sage, much like the writer himself. It is a story about how (Jewish) suffering is transformed into wisdom, the experience of humiliation into a kind of art.

Another unexpected reversal helps us understand how "Yentl," like so much of Singer's work, might have shocked traditional Yiddish sensibilities. A girl, determined not to be relegated to the kitchen, studies the holy books, at first secretly with her adoring father, then disguised as a yeshiva student, mingling with young men, even briefly marrying another woman. But the genius of the story rests not in Singer's anticipation of same-sex marriage but in his exploration of how clothes and appearances unsettle gender and how the mysteries of gender unsettle the human heart. In the *bais medrash*, the study hall, poring over tractates of the Talmud in the traditional singsong manner, Yentl develops a bond with her study partner, Avigdor, that is deeper than love, a bond the ancient rabbis might have understood:

> Only now did Yentl grasp the meaning of the Torah's prohibition against wearing the clothes of the other sex. By doing so one deceived not only others but also oneself. Even the soul was perplexed, finding itself incarnate in a strange body.

In the end, Yentl's deep disguise, the transformation of her very soul, has left her nowhere to go, a creature wandering between the two sexes. As Ilan Stavans, the editor of the *Collected Stories*, remarks, she has a man's soul in a woman's body. "I'm neither one nor the other," she tells Avigdor, once he learns her true identity. Barred from true marriage with man or woman, she can only yield her place, joining together two people who love her, whom fortune has kept apart.

Finally, "The Cafeteria" is one of those later works in which a man much like the author becomes the vehicle for someone else's story, in this case about a woman who claims to have seen Hitler on the Upper West Side, convening a late-night meeting in the same cafeteria where Singer, along with other Yiddish literati, loved to eat, read the papers and talk for hours on end over coffee and danish. But as Hitler and his minions become this woman's nightmare, the woman herself becomes Singer's—a figure who disturbs him, perhaps an authentic seer who has pierced the veil of time and space, perhaps simply a madwoman. She may even be a figment of his own troubled imagination, so mysteriously does she disappear and reappear. For Singer, feeling safe but hardly secure in America, the Holocaust, which turned the world he knew into ash, had a quality of near-hallucination, which this story brilliantly recaptures. Why would such a woman not have seen Hitler? How could she ever stop seeing him? Though reason tells us otherwise, Singer and his readers can scarcely set aside what she has witnessed.

Adapting his work at last to an American setting, Singer did not bury what he left behind but dealt with it instead as trauma, as memory, or a series of encounters with ghosts and shadows in a twilight zone he himself imagined, with elements borrowed from the Jewish tradition, from philosophical speculation and from the literature of the fantastic. Like his Hasidic and Kabbalistic forebears, he found in the tradition something more radical, more disorienting, than its rational defenders were able to understand. Without Freud's help, they saw the human heart as riven by passion, hope, pain and contradiction. And so Singer's almost archaic traditionalism, with its resistance to all forms of enlightenment and progress, became the deepest source of his surprisingly modern outlook. ■

Little Big Man

PAUL GRIFFITHS

RICHARD WAGNER: The Last of the Titans. By Joachim Köhler. Yale. 688 pp. $40.

No musical life has been told more often than Wagner's. Biographies have wafted incense around him, or been incensed by him. Their authors have seen him as lofty philosopher or opportunist, as seer or dungheap of prejudices, as wide-eyed revolutionary or dark patron of fascism—as, in any event, a colossus in the world, a figure of immense power and authority, for good or ill. Standing on so high a column of books, he almost has to be viewed as a monument, whether to be revered or decried.

The subtitle of Joachim Köhler's Wagner biography, *The Last of the Titans*, suggests nothing less. The reference is to the title of the composer's early opera *Rienzi, the Last of the Tribunes*, about the rise and fall of a political leader in fourteenth-century Rome, and also to a comment made by Marie von Wittgenstein, who knew Wagner through her stepfather Franz Liszt: "He cursed humanity for refusing to see that he was a Titan and that Titans should not be measured by ordinary standards."

Titans who have to protest their Titanship, however, are Titans of a poor sort. And though Köhler sees his subject as "one of those people who do not adapt to reality but force reality to adapt to them," the image he evokes is that of a man who spent his life trying again and again to restage his early childhood. While holding a clear view of the composer's importance, and of the manifoldness of that importance, Köhler pursues his thorough research with a fresh outlook and gives us a new Wagner: little Richard.

The one reality Wagner could not force was the memory of his childhood. He was born in Leipzig in 1813, into a family from the lower end of the bourgeoisie and only semi-respectable. His mother, Johanna Ro-

Paul Griffiths writes on classical music for the New York Times. *He is the author, most recently, of the* Penguin Companion to Classical Music.

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sine, had been a prince's mistress in her teens and then married a civil servant, Friedrich Wagner. By the time of Richard's birth she had eight older children to neglect. Friedrich died when the future composer was 6 months old, and Johanna Rosine married Ludwig Geyer, a theater man of multiple minor talents as actor, painter and playwright, with whom she had been conducting an affair, and who may have been, as Wagner suspected, his true father. Parent or stepparent, Geyer was a man to resent. He could be blamed for consuming Johanna Rosine's attention, and though he died when the boy Wagner was 8, the damage was done. Nor was it reversed. Partly for the reason of his schooling, Wagner was farmed out to his uncles. The one source of light and love in his young life, Köhler suggests, was his sister Rosalie, ten years older and already a professional actress by the time of Geyer's death. In the theater of the young Wagner's imagination, Geyer was the demon king, Johanna Rosine the lost and longed-for mother, and Rosalie the fair, consoling princess.

Rosalie died while giving birth, when Wagner was in his mid-20s. He construed her death as a sacrifice, made, in Köhler's odd phrase, "to restore him to the straight and narrow." It did more than that. It gave him his central subject, that of the woman whose loving death brings redemption to the hero. So, four years after Rosalie, Senta would die for the doomed central character of Wagner's first mature opera, *The Flying Dutchman*. So Elisabeth, already dead, would redeem Tannhäuser. So Isolde, singing over her dead Tristan, would transcend death in dying. So Brünnhilde, similarly unleashing what is both love song and elegy for Siegfried, would bring about the end of a flawed universe.

Köhler analyzes each of the operas as another effort to remake the Wagner-Geyer family saga. Works that Wagner saw as restoring the communal celebration of myth known to the Greeks, with poetry, music and theater in a sublime union, are viewed as covert domestic dramas—which in many respects is what they are, too, on the surface, like the Greek plays. Sometimes Köhler's interpretation is strained, as when any bird—even the swan that Parsifal as a wild boy heedlessly brings down—is seen as an avatar of Geyer by virtue of the homophone *Geier* (vulture). Much more often, though, and in their essence, these readings are persuasive. They also find some support in Wagner's own view that "my art comes only from my own unhappiness."

"Wagner lived," Köhler concludes—his characteristic eloquence finely rendered as ever in Stewart Spencer's translation—

"Be ashamed to die until you have won some victory for humanity."

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"in a permanent state of regression, a state that resembled a descent into an abandoned mine, its tunnels extending not only as far as the forgotten legacy of the 'German folk' but also to the legacy of his own particular past. The incalculable treasures he had always dreamt about lay ready for him to gather up, for the place where his origins were to be found was also the wellspring of his own creativity." By viewing his life as a folk tale, he was able to rescue himself from a bleak childhood in terms drawn from the roots of German culture—and, indeed, from the root of what it is to be human, since stories of heroes, tyrants and angels exist in every population. Then, because the past can never permanently be healed, he would have to make the rescue again, for which we may be thankful.

But it cannot be just for his grasp of old stories that Wagner's personal traumas, and the means he found to resolve them, became so profoundly meaningful to so many people. Köhler predictably finds one source of their power in how they are embedded in nineteenth-century philosophy, though he discounts the debts Wagner was proud to claim to the pessimism of Schopenhauer. Indeed, Siegfried and Brünnhilde do not sound like people passively awaiting the will of the world. They are, rather, Hegelians, made of conflict to live in a world of conflict, and to strive toward a higher state of consciousness for themselves and for humanity. Hegel, Schelling and Fichte, Köhler insists, are the authors Wagner read with most profit.

As for the fellow artists Wagner studied, Köhler again offers a revisionist genealogy that is both plausible and stimulating. It is not Beethoven who is paramount here but Carl Maria von Weber, whose new opera *Der Freischütz* made such an impression on the 8-year-old Wagner that he put on a performance in the family drawing room, then watched through the window as the composer passed by en route from rehearsals at the opera house. More than half a century later, Bayreuth provided a vastly enlarged sitting room for works whose magic harmonies and tales of battles between human good and supernatural evil were inspired by Weber's opera. In much the same way, Wagner's stories of goblins and trickery can be traced not only to personal experience and national culture but also to the tales of E.T.A. Hoffmann, of whom his father, Friedrich Wagner, was an acquaintance. To the end of his life, Wagner was remaking his childhood with the means of his childhood.

But not entirely. In 1853, just before beginning work on the score of *Das Rheingold*, he was visited by Liszt. (This is how it was: The only person Wagner would deign to visit was King Ludwig II of Bavaria.) Liszt played through some of his recent orchestral music and thereby became, Köhler argues, midwife to *The Ring*, Wagner's four-opera epic of self-interest inexorably undermining the social fabric, with only love to protest. That may well be, but Wagner had already achieved—in *The Flying Dutchman*, twelve years before—his music's unique power to engross, and its unrivaled specificity in making thoughts and emotions into sound.

Used to exalt or excoriate all kinds of utopias, both fascist and socialist, Wagner's Ring *cycle cannot easily be claimed by any ideology.*

Köhler is excellent in describing the Wagnerian musical substance. "In itself," he rather startlingly begins, "music meant nothing to him": It "had to give expression to a world of living ideas." Having thus introduced one of the great questions of musical aesthetics—how do notes mean?—Köhler offers a cogent biological metaphor: "The unfolding patterns of nature are reflected in the themes that emerge from each other." But though this nicely conveys the experience of listening to what Wagner called his "endless melody," it by no means completes the equation between music and meaning. Nor is rhetoric any help, even without the slippery grammar of sentences like "His musical concepts do not illustrate the intended object in the manner of labels but allow audiences to perceive their very essence." What is it in the "musical concept" that makes the essence of something nonmusical perceptible? The examples Köhler provides are all too elementary, for anyone can see how music might body forth flickering fire, rocking waves or the hammering of anvils. What we would like to know is how, without words, it can project aspiration, bad faith or the shadow of death.

Köhler also goes too far with his nature image. "The world's stage opens up to humans," he says, "whose voices do not obey the rules of the themes." But though some of the themes are indeed restricted to the orchestra, many can also be sung. Moreover, nearly all of them have a vocal quality, and so conjure up, from within the orchestra, the image of a voice, human if not personal. The contrast Köhler wants to find in the music, between unconscious—therefore unfree—nature and free human beings, is surely present, but not as a distinction between orchestra and voices. Indeed, Wagner's towering feat was to create orchestral music that suggests not only a voice but a consciousness. Unconscious, elemental nature is present rather in the form of simple harmony, as the pure consonance of the opening of *Das Rheingold*. Humanity and freedom bring dissonance.

Wagner's solution to this musical problem, because he lived in the nineteenth century and not the twentieth, had to be a return to consonance at the end, and therefore an extinction or a transcendence of the human—most often an extinction and a transcendence at the same time, the Wagnerian redemptive sacrifice. The principal characters have to die or be redeemed (i.e., lose their unruly consciousnesses) in order to bring the enormous harmonic structure of a Wagner opera to a close. Thus *The Ring*, for example, is in some respects indeed a ring, returning finally to natural concord, with almost the entire dramatis personae deceased. This might seem to mirror Schopenhauer's vision of human beings as flotsam and jetsam on the unthinking sea of the universal will, except that Wagner was well aware of composing his operas for three groups of people: the singing characters, the orchestra and the audience. Most of the people on stage may be dead as the world returns to a state of nature, but now human love is established in the orchestra as a part of nature, and those who have watched and listened have been changed by the experience of this happening. This is where Wagner's Hegelian energy of conflict and supersession went, into working not only on his characters but also, very directly, on his audience. No composer has known better how to stir.

But stir to what end? Köhler's view of the music's underlying direction—if not quite its intention—was unmistakable in his earlier book *Wagner's Hitler: The Prophet and His Disciple*. Here he is not concerned to make that case again, and points out that *The Ring* has been used to exalt or excoriate all kinds of utopias, both fascist and socialist. It cannot easily be claimed by any ideology, because its only certainties, on a social level, are in failure.

Yet the gruesome parallel looms, as it must in any consideration of this composer. Wagner is part of the German story not just because he went mining in folklore but also because of the alarming foreshadowings of Nazism in his personal views—most notoriously his anti-Semitism—and in his works. No other German artist from before 1933 is besmirched in this way; something

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is wrong here, and productions of the operas since 1945 have often tried to find a solution, whether by abstraction (the solution adopted by the composer's grandson Wieland at Bayreuth in the 1950s and early '60s) or by staging a confrontation on the ideological plane (as often since Patrice Chéreau's *Ring* at Bayreuth in 1976).

What is most worrisome, however, lies not in the librettos, which productions can challenge, but in the music, whose power is hard for performers to restrain or divert. And in the power is the problem, for the music so easily persuades its listeners that its power is theirs. If we leave the theater after *Das Rheingold* feeling the thrill of the gods' march into Valhalla, then we have missed the point, for the gods' momentary victory is founded on chicanery. The point, though, is very easy to miss. The music at such moments rises to burst through the story and claim the audience directly. We have to both acknowledge and resist that claim—and there are lessons in resistance, in subtler understandings of the Wagnerian emotional breaker, all through Wagner's own works.

If Wagner's music was robbed of its multiplicity after his death and made an agent of conservatism, Köhler knows whom to blame: the composer's second wife, Cosima, Liszt's daughter. "As an artist," he asserts, "Wagner subscribed to the concept of philosophical truth, a concept that Cosima could counter only with the bombast of pretension." Bayreuth was her invention. Wagner would have been happy to tear down the theater after the initial *Ring* production of 1876, and saw it used again only for the 1882 premiere of *Parsifal*. Within months of his death, Cosima had revived *Parsifal*, to which she steadily added the other operas in ensuing years, building the Bayreuth canon and the Bayreuth aura as both have survived for more than a century. Works that had been intended to change the world became idols in a great living mausoleum.

Köhler's effort to liberate Wagner from the Wagnerians is welcome, but overstated. Nobody could have been quite such a queen of Victorian repression, hypocrisy and fawning as Köhler's Cosima. And though it is true that she had far more effect on the circulation of Wagner's works than on their content, given that all his operas had been conceived when he was a young man, it is hard, nevertheless, to believe he did not see *Parsifal* as something special, in line with the special term he invented for it: *Bühnenweihfestspiel*, or "festival play to consecrate a stage." The theater was to become holy now that the church no longer was.

As Köhler reveals, Wagner remained throughout his life a child, and both the idiotic ideas he cherished and the tearing power of his music can be ascribed to a small child's egocentricity, irrationality and volatility. But he was also a child of his time. Like his contemporaries Darwin and Marx, he sought an alternative to religion as a ground for meaning, and he found it in the discoveries and disputes of art. The overgrown boy playing with his toy theater was also shifting figures on the platform of the universe, and he has still not been told not to meddle. ■

Of Love and Other Demons

NATHANIEL RICH

The first chapter of *Too Brief a Treat: The Letters of Truman Capote* follows our hero's adventures from 1936 through 1948, a particularly heady period of his life. Capote leaves Alabama for New York City, joins the staff of *The New Yorker*, sells his first stories (for which he wins several national awards), becomes a popular fixture in the New York literary scene and in the salons of Paris, meets the love of his life and signs a major book deal with Random House for his novel *Other Voices, Other Rooms*. By the time the chapter ends, Capote is a best-selling and critically lauded novelist, and even a national celebrity. He has just turned 24, though with his slight, 5'3" frame, skirling falsetto voice and golden bangs, he looked not a day older than 12. "For God's sake!" shouted *New Yorker* editor Harold Ross, upon seeing Capote for the first time in his office. "What's that?"

BOOKS DISCUSSED IN THIS REVIEW:

TOO BRIEF A TREAT: The Letters of Truman Capote.
Edited by Gerald Clarke.
Random House. 487 pp. $27.95.

THE COMPLETE STORES OF TRUMAN CAPOTE.
By Truman Capote.
Modern Library. 300 pp. $24.95.

OTHER VOICES, OTHER ROOMS.
By Truman Capote.
Modern Library. 194 pp. $19.95.

On the first page of this opening chapter, which editor Gerald Clarke understatedly titles "The Exuberant Years," there is a photograph that captures perfectly Capote's spirit at the time. Taken in Tangiers by Cecil Beaton, the photograph shows a singing Capote mid-leap, spread-eagled and arms outstretched like a bounding Lindy Hopper. The ground is not even in the frame—for all we know he is thirty feet in the air. Although Capote would go on to even greater literary success and celebrity with the publication of *Breakfast at Tiffany's* (1958) and *In Cold Blood* (1966), he was never more full of hope and excitement than in these early years. Each piece of correspondence reads like a love letter, breathless and exclamatory. He was always very affectionate toward his friends, often effusively so, but in these letters, written before he had made his first enemies or alienated those closest to him, he seems in love with everything and everyone—with New York, his editors, his friends, his lovers and, most of all, his work. Here is the beginning of a letter written to Mary Louise Aswell, his editor at *Harper's Bazaar*:

> Marylou, divinely beloved,
> This must be love! For you are the only one I ever write: yes, it is love…

A letter to Leo Lerman, a writer friend who held weekly parties attended by prominent New York writers and film stars:

> Dearest baby, have I ever told you that I loved You? I do, you know, very, very much.

To his Random House editor, Robert Linscott:

> I am working on the book and it is really my love and today I wrote two pages and oh Bob I do want it to be a beautiful book because it seems important to me that people try to write beautifully, now more than ever because the world is so crazy and only art is sane…

The fiction Capote wrote at this time tells a very different, less happy, story than the letters. On the eightieth anniversary of Capote's birth, Random House has published, in addition to the volume of select-

Nathaniel Rich is the author of the forthcoming San Francisco Noir, *to be published in January by the Little Bookworm.*

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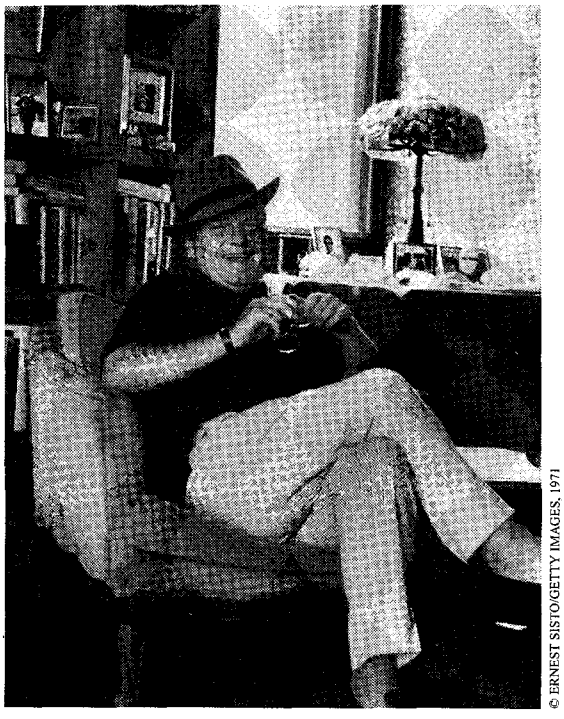
ed letters, his complete short fiction and a new Modern Library edition of *Other Voices, Other Rooms*. Although it's often tempting to peruse an author's private letters in search of some kind of secret biographical key to his fiction, in Capote's case it is the fiction that reveals much that lies hidden in the letters. Reading Capote's fiction (and to a lesser extent, his nonfiction), one is overwhelmed by the preponderance of characters burdened not with an abundance of love but with its absence.

Other Voices, Other Rooms is the story of Joel Knox, a young boy who, after his mother's death, is sent to live with a father he has never met. Joel arrives at a crumbling old mansion where he meets Miss Amy, his father's second wife, the amiable, eccentric Cousin Randolph and Zoo, their maid. His father, however, is nowhere to be found. Nor will anyone tell Joel where he is, despite his desperate questioning. The only evidence that there is anyone else in the house is a red tennis ball that bounces slowly down the stairway from time to time, causing the adults of the household to rush upstairs. Joel waits below, confused and daydreaming images of his mysterious, longed-for father.

While playing outside one afternoon, Joel believes that he sees someone sitting in a window on the top floor of the house. It is a strange old lady, her white hair like "the wig of a character from history: a towering pale pompadour with fat dribbling curls." She smiles and nods at Joel. Despite Cousin Randolph's and Miss Amy's efforts to convince him otherwise, Joel is certain that she is real. He does not know who she is, but on some level she must seem familiar, since "the hazy substance of her face, the suffused marshmallow features, brought to mind his own vaporish reflection." When the book ends, Joel has found a father figure, and has found someone to love him. But the man he finds is not his father.

Capote himself was abandoned early by both parents and sent at the age of 5 to live with three middle-aged cousins in the small town of Monroeville, Alabama. He rejoined his mother after her marriage to Joe Capote, a Cuban businessman, who legally adopted Truman and brought him to live with them in New York. Although Capote's childhood is not reflected in great depth in *Too Brief a Treat*, the volume begins with one early note, sent by a 12-year-old Capote to his estranged father, Arch Persons. Bearing neither greeting nor signature, the letter tersely requests that Persons address him in the future as Truman Capote, not Persons, "as everyone knows me by that name." It is the coldest, least affectionate letter in the entire collection. While later letters to his father are more forgiving, they express only the obligatory affection with which one addresses a distant relation, a striking contrast to his many tender letters to acquaintances and friends. When Capote receives a letter from his grandmother chastising him for being unkind to his father, Capote curtly responds: "As for Arch, and all his complaining about my supposed neglect—well, I entered into a most friendly correspondence with him last spring." Which is to say, Arch asked for money, and Capote flatly refused him.



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Truman Capote in 1971

In Capote's stories, the horrors and pain of one's past have a way of coming back, with more haunting consequences than a money request. In "The Shape of Things," a shell-shocked soldier onboard a train just after the war suffers violent convulsive fits, to the great discomfiture of his fellow passengers. In "A Tree of Night," a young woman on a train meets a hydrocephalic midget woman and a mute manchild with grabby hands; when she escapes to the observation platform she is overcome by an amorphous, senseless fear, whose source she cannot quite trace. Then she realizes:

> it was a memory, a childish memory of terrors that once, long ago, had hovered above her like haunted limbs on a tree of night. Aunts, cooks, strangers—each eager to spin a tale or teach a rhyme of spooks and death, omens, spirits, demons. And always there had been the unfailing threat of the wizard man...

In "The Headless Hawk," a lonesome art dealer discovers a mesmerizing painting whose gruesome image prompts him to examine the failures of his past. Looking at the painting, he realizes that "he was...a poet who had never written poetry, a painter who had never painted, a lover who had never loved..." In "Shut a Final Door," a miserable social climber is driven mad by a voice, "dull and sexless and remote," that telephones him incessantly. The mysterious caller never identifies itself but says only, "You've known me a long time," before hanging up. And in the eerie, perfect "Miriam," the story that helped win Capote his first book contract, an elderly woman, Miriam, is tormented by a strange young girl with long silver-white hair, also named Miriam. Only at the end of the story do we realize that the shared name is no coincidence. Even in *Breakfast at Tiffany's*, which is not included in the *Complete Stories*, Holly Golightly is visited by a figure from a squalid past she has tried to forget: Doc Golightly, her husband, a horse doctor who has come to bring her back from Manhattan to his farm in Tulip, Texas. When the story's narrator, a Capote alter-ego, meets Doc, he mistakes him for Holly's father.

Capote took a break from fiction to write *In Cold Blood*, a heartbreaking account of the massacre of an innocent family in the small town of Holcomb, Kansas. He spent over five nerve-racking years on the project, obsessively researching the town, the crimes and the lives of the two killers. In the process he made convenient friendships with both the chief investigator on the case, Alvin Dewey, and the killers, Perry Smith and Richard Hickock—especially Smith, who came from a troubled family background much like Capote's. "My life...has a few certain similarities to yours," he writes to Smith in an autobiographical letter that ends, "I am not in the habit of making such confidences. However, I do not mind telling you anything." Meanwhile, Capote regales the star-struck Dewey family with gossip about his other pals, like Audrey Hepburn, Jackie Kennedy and Cary Grant, and floods them with airplane tickets, boxes of chocolate, fifths of J&B Scotch (Alvin's favorite)

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and cash ("please use the enclosed to buy a Christmas present all the family will enjoy"), while at the same time soliciting confidential information about the prolonged murder trial. Capote, who had always started work on a story by writing the ending first, had to wait five agonizing years to find out how *In Cold Blood* would end. "The strain is just too much," he complained to the Deweys, a full four years before the book would be completed. "Every morning of my life I throw up because of the tensions created by the writing of this book." Once the killers were finally hanged and the book published, Capote, now a literary giant with movie-star fame, left for a well-earned holiday. He never really returned.

In the following years, Capote played wife-sitter and court jester to his new friends the Paleys, the Vanderbilts and the Radziwills, and his correspondence dwindled to a smattering of postcards and telegrams. Whenever he wanted to reach someone now, he just picked up the telephone. After all, he could afford to pay long-distance. In the mid-70s *Esquire* published several chapters from the long-awaited *Answered Prayers*, which Capote claimed to have been writing for nearly a decade and believed would be his masterpiece: an epic novel about the Very Rich that he likened to *Remembrance of Things Past* (never mind that he had most likely not actually read Proust). If *In Cold Blood* was a nonfiction novel, *Answered Prayers* was lightly fictionalized gossip, in which Capote dished about the private scandals of his Very Rich friends. (Capote's jilted society friends would get a chance to return the favor in George Plimpton's excellent *Truman Capote: In Which Various Friends, Enemies, Acquaintances, and Detractors Recall His Turbulent Career*, published in 1997, which can be read as a more salacious, and often more revealing, companion to Clarke's biography and the collected letters.) The Very Rich promptly stopped taking his calls.

For the second time in his life Capote felt a profound sense of abandonment by those he believed to have loved him. This time he would not recover. "But they know I'm a writer," he would say in the coming months, in a dazed state of depression. "I don't understand it." Now he bounced between rehab clinics instead of yachts and private islands, battling worsening addictions to sleeping pills and vodka. Although Capote was reluctant to discuss his declining health, his letters do reflect one startling change. As a young man, always eager to elicit sympathy and affection, he would often alarm his friends with letters describing the various physical woes he claimed had beset him. In one three-year period he complained of such afflictions as tonsillitis, a mysterious ailment "rather like leukemia," serious electric burns, temporary blindness, gastroenteritis, cholera, toothache, grippe, dysentery, a weak heart, tooth loss, crabs and numerous fevers, infections and influenzas. "Dramatic as it may sound," he wrote in 1946, "I wonder really whether I shall be able to live through the winter." But by the late 1970s his flair for self-pity had been transformed into a delusional optimism, which must have been far more alarming to his few remaining friends. "Am the picture of health. Have become a lifetime teetolar [sic], and really enjoy it," he wrote in a letter to William Styron, after drunkenly crashing his car into an oncoming vehicle. "I feel so clear and optimistic," he wrote, shortly before being informed by doctors that his prolonged addictions to drugs and alcohol were shrinking his brain. "Am soberer than ever," he reported, while suffering drug-induced epileptic fits and violent paranoid hallucinations.

In 1982, two years before his death, Capote published a final short story, "One Christmas." Written just after Arch Persons's death, the story recalls a rare childhood visit between Capote and his father in New Orleans. The 6-year-old Capote dreads the trip and when he arrives, is embarrassed to observe that his father has become a drunk and a gigolo to wealthy older women. Late on Christmas Eve, unable to fall asleep, the boy spies his father laying out his presents beneath the tree. He is devastated. Having already lost faith in his father, he is now forced to lose faith in Santa Claus. On the bus ride home, he writes,

> I felt the strangest pain. A crushing pain that hurt everywhere. I thought if I took off my heavy city shoes, those crucifying monsters, the agony would ease. I took them off, but the mysterious pain did not leave me. In a way it never has; never will. ■

Dissent or Assent?

GEORGE SCIALABBA

ARGUING ABOUT WAR. By Michael Walzer. Yale. 208 pp. $25.

Michael Walzer's best book is not, unfortunately, his most influential. *Spheres of Justice* (1983) succeeds brilliantly in imagining "an egalitarianism that is consistent with liberty." In every society, Walzer observes, each social good has a distinctive meaning, which tells us who is entitled to it. Medical care should go to the ill; places in medical school to those most able and eager to heal; political and civil rights to every citizen; political office to the most persuasive; prizes and renown to those who (according to the best judges) excel; love to those who can make themselves loved; money to those who (in Walzer's inspired example) make the best blintzes or provide other goods and services that may be bought and sold. But medical care, medical training, citizenship, political power, honors and love should not be bought and sold, directly or indirectly; they must be earned in some other way, or simply deserved without being earned. Pursued in detail, this insight yields a complete—and completely convincing—theory of distributive justice. In scope, rigor and originality, *Spheres of Justice* is the equal of John Rawls's *A Theory of Justice*, though it has had only a fraction of the latter's influence.

Walzer's *Just and Unjust Wars* (1977), on the other hand, which is little more than an elegant restatement with minor revisions of the traditional "just war" paradigm, has spawned an entire literature and become required reading at America's military academies. *Arguing About War*, a collection of essays published in *Dissent*, *The New Republic*, *Social Research* and elsewhere, is Walzer's first book since then about international affairs. Although the book is very uneven in quality—mostly bad, in fact—its topicality and Walzer's reputation make it worth a look.

The best essay in the collection is the least topical: "Governing the Globe." How centralized or decentralized should (future) global governance be? What kinds of organizations should coordinate which spheres of activity? How might the world

George Scialabba writes about books in Dissent, The Nation *and elsewhere.*

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evolve from where we are toward a balanced regime that promotes collective security, distributive justice, cultural pluralism and individual freedom? In twenty pages (the book's longest essay), Walzer sketches a reasonable approach to these questions—which is as much as anyone could do in twenty pages.

The other essays in *Arguing About War* are divided between applied (i.e., to terrorism and humanitarian intervention) theory and contemporary cases (the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and the Iraq war). Exasperatingly, in this book, as in *Just and Unjust Wars*, Walzer writes as if the morality of the use of force in international affairs could be usefully discussed with little or no reference to the United Nations Charter. In *Just and Unjust Wars*, Walzer dealt briskly with the question of the Charter's relevance. Defending Israeli reprisals, he declared that because the UN has "clearly not [been] ready or able to enforce the law," its decrees "do not command intellectual or moral respect." States are therefore entitled, he implied, to ignore their obligations under the Charter—at least, he never mentioned any such obligation as binding on any state. His position in *Arguing About War* is identical. Except for disparaging references to its ineffectuality, the UN scarcely figures.

From a moral theorist, this is wholly inadequate. States are not entitled to disregard their solemn obligations because others do—especially when their own past disregard (as is true, notably though not exclusively, of the United States and Israel) is part of the reason why those others do. The UN Charter is the supreme law of the United States and of most or all other countries who have signed it. It is a pledge to renounce the use of force except as authorized by the Security Council. It does not include a provision releasing states from this pledge whenever they decide that other states aren't living up to it. So a law-abiding state may not, since 1945, make a determination—whether based on just-war theory, on its views about its "national interest" or on anything else—to use force (except in an emergency, very narrowly defined in Article 51).

Though legally sovereign, the UN is indeed ineffective. An honest approach to these matters would admit as much, go on to explore why the collective security system envisioned in the Charter has not worked out as hoped and then try to suggest how habits—and eventually instincts—of restraint, consultation and deference to collective decision-making might be patiently and gradually fostered, especially by the world's strongest and richest states. But this would require acknowledging a great deal of lawless international behavior by the United States and Israel—something Walzer has always, especially in the latter case, been loath to do. As much as anything else, what has undermined the UN's authority has been the manipulation of dependent member-states by the two global superpowers (especially the stronger one); the refusal of the United States to submit its ferocious and protracted aggressive war in Indochina to Security Council decision; the withholding of America's UN dues; the many assertions of unilateral prerogative by American leaders of both political parties; and Israel's unwillingness since 1948 to honor the conditions of its admission to the UN: the return of Palestinian refugees from the 1947–48 war and the acceptance of an adjoining Palestinian state, a refusal supported and financed since 1967 by the United States. Though never, as I said, a particularly forthright critic of US foreign policy, Walzer might conceivably have brought himself to address the first several of these causes. But I suspect he would sooner be boiled in oil than acknowledge the final one. So he ignores or dismisses any line of inquiry that might make such an acknowledgment necessary.

Walzer writes as if the morality of the use of force in foreign affairs could be discussed with little or no reference to the UN Charter.

This evasive maneuver is characteristic. Frequently, what is most important—and objectionable—in these essays is what is taken for granted, implied, mentioned only in passing. Important questions are deftly closed off or passed by; dubious or indefensible premises go unstated but are somehow insinuated; opposing positions are subtly deprecated as implausible or irresponsible without quite being formulated or even attributed to anyone. Consequently, much of what I want to argue with in *Arguing About War* must be dragged out from between the lines.

"Terrorism: A Critique of Excuses" shows Walzer at his shiftiest. "We live today," he announces, "in a political culture of excuses" for terrorism. This seems to me highly questionable, but Walzer pretends it is so obvious that "there is no need" to cite examples; "my readers can make their own attributions," which is very convenient for him. Still, a footnote informs us, two essays are such flagrant offenders that he "cannot resist" naming them as prime specimens: one by Edward Said, the other by Richard Falk; both appeared in *The Nation* in June 1986.

This is a disgraceful slur. To "excuse," according to *Webster's Second International*, means to "remove or lessen blame for," "seek indulgence for," "extenuate," "exculpate," "pardon, forgive, overlook." There is not a hint of a breath of an excuse for terrorism in either Falk's or Said's essay. Nor does Walzer attempt to show that there is. He simply slanders two political opponents, presumably because they point out that after one has condemned terrorism, more remains to be said.

What more? First, that by the ordinary definition of terrorism—deliberate violence against civilians for political purposes (apart from war crimes, which are equally abhorrent)—both Israel and the United States have been guilty of terrorism: the former during its 1978 and 1982 invasions of Lebanon as well as for many of its bombing raids in that country at other times; the latter far more extensively, through its support, training and arms sales to many brutal regimes and insurgencies. Second, that the definition of terrorism should perhaps be broadened to include reprisals that can hardly fail to produce civilian casualties, like the bombing, strafing and bulldozing of inhabited areas where guerrillas are hiding; or that cause a grave deterioration in the life of an entire society, like large-scale jailings, house demolitions, curfews, roadblocks, checkpoints, school closings, border closings, import restrictions, destruction of cultural, administrative and agricultural resources, and more. Third, that those responsible for a massive, flagrant, persistent injustice, which they could remedy without grave detriment to their own security, and which terrorists claim to be protesting, deserve some blame for the terrorists' crimes (an allocation that does not at all diminish the terrorists' blame, obviously). There are also fourth, fifth, sixth and many more things to be said on this subject. Walzer wants to prevent them all from being said by labeling them in advance as "excuse," "apology" and "appeasement."

"The Four Wars of Israel/Palestine" is the book's main essay on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Against the "great simplifiers" (i.e., his political opponents) Walzer argues bravely and complexly that there are rejectionists (bad) and accommodationists (good) on both sides. One might think this would not be news even to many of the great simplifiers, and that repeating what nearly every-

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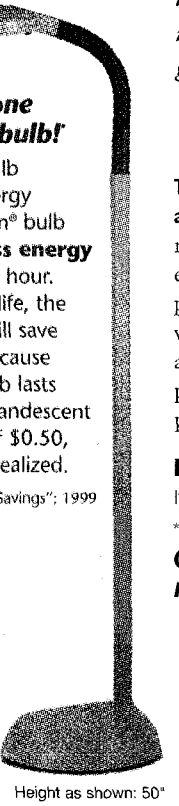

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one knows can hardly be the purpose of a medium-sized essay. In fact, I think that, notwithstanding some reasonable (though not very bold or controversial) things said in this essay and in "The *Intifada* and the Green Line" (the book's other essay on Israel/Palestine), the point of both lies in some other, less reasonable things lurking between the lines.

Here he is, for example, hailing the first intifada: "What PLO terrorists failed to achieve over 20 years, teenagers with slingshots have achieved in eight months. They have put Palestine on the moral map, alongside Israel." And a little further on, chiding the Israeli right: "When Prime Minister Shamir says of the *intifada* that it is a new form of warfare against the State of Israel...he is saying something absurd. But the absurdity is widely accepted—for haven't the Arabs been at war with Israel for 40 years now, always refusing (Egypt the only exception) to accept Israeli statehood?" Both these remarks unobtrusively take for granted the notion—widely believed in the United States, though nowhere else—that neither Palestinian Arabs nor their political representatives have shown any readiness for a diplomatic settlement with Israel since its founding in 1948. On the contrary: As the Israeli historian Simha Flapan first showed in *The Birth of Israel: Myth and Reality* (1987), after the initial failure of resistance, the majority of Palestinian Arabs accepted partition as inevitable, even if not desirable, and were ready to live peacefully either alongside Israel or, in the case of the refugees, under Israeli sovereignty. The failure to reach a settlement after 1948 was due primarily, in Flapan's words, to David Ben-Gurion's "active strategy to prevent, at all costs, the creation of the Palestinian state as called for in the UN Partition Resolution." As for the "20 years" (1967–87) Walzer refers to, supposedly barren of any response from the other side to Israel's constant desire for peace, his implied history is no more accurate. The Egyptian peace offer of 1971, the PLO-authored Security Council resolution of January 1976 and the Saudi-sponsored Fahd plan of 1981 were all serious proposals, which Israel either contemptuously rejected or did not even acknowledge.

Another sly formulation, this one about Camp David 2000: "Arafat refused to make peace and survived; Barak failed to make peace and was defeated (we can learn something about the constituencies of the two men from this contrast)." What we are meant to learn is that Barak and the Israelis were serious about a just settlement, while Arafat and the Palestinians were not. As Tanya Reinhart in *Israel/Palestine: How to End the War of 1948* and Naseer Aruri in *Dishonest Broker: The US Role in Israel and Palestine* both demonstrate, this is untrue. Barak's offer did not divide Jerusalem, did not give Palestinians effective control of a contiguous 90 percent of the West Bank, and required that UN Resolutions 194 (mandating the return of Palestinian refugees) and 242 (mandating Israeli withdrawal from the West Bank and Gaza) no longer be the basis for negotiations. It was not the "generous offer" of mainstream mythology.

Why the rush to war in Iraq? Walzer has nothing to say except to take the Administration at its word: 'Delay is dangerous.'

The first of the "four wars of Israel/Palestine" is the "Palestinian war to destroy the state of Israel." Some Palestinians wage this war with bombs, others by insisting on their "right of return." The latter is a baseless claim, Walzer implies; after all, "Palestinians are still in camps because a decision was made, by their own leaders and by the adjacent Arab states, to keep them there: this was a way of insisting that Israel's independence war was not yet over." Shouldn't a devotee of moral complexity at least have taken note of an additional explanation—that they are "still in camps" because the Israeli government decided, in defiance of its legal and moral obligations, in 1948 (and again in 1967, when an additional 150,000 Palestinians fled) not to allow them to return to their homes but instead to expropriate and settle their lands? And moreover, that if they had been allowed to return home, it is not at all impossible that two generations of misery would have been avoided without having jeopardized Israel's independence?

"The first war has to be defeated or definitively renounced. Critics of Israel in Europe and at the United Nations have made a terrible mistake, a moral as well as a political mistake, in failing to acknowledge the necessity of this defeat." The suggestion that European critics of Israel are indifferent to its threatened destruction is another slander. What explains this one is the unwillingness of those Europeans to line up behind America in support of Israel's extensive land grabs in the West Bank and murderous aggression in Lebanon. That cannot be, Walzer would like his readers to believe, a matter of principled concern for Palestinian self-determination or international law, much less simple decency; it must be moral fanaticism or sheer dislike of Israel.

I have cited several statements in *Arguing About War* that seem to me inaccurate, misleading or biased, invariably in Israel's favor. They are representative of many more. Twenty-five years ago, in a review of *Just and Unjust Wars*, Noam Chomsky tellingly observed that Walzer all too often "assigns a special status to Israel and reconstructs the moral world accordingly." Sadly, Walzer has not profited from that comradely criticism. On the contrary, to judge from *Arguing About War*, the distortion of moral perspective that Chomsky noted has become chronic, and probably terminal.

Arguing About War also contains five short essays on Iraq. Their gist is given by the title of the first one: "Inspectors Yes, War No." The main problem is "European irresponsibility": If France, Germany and Russia had themselves threatened to enforce inspections militarily, the United States would not have had to. But they have been "committed, all along, to appeasement." Walzer proposes giving them one more chance, after which "many of us will probably end up, very reluctantly, supporting the war the Bush administration seems so eager to fight."

Why was the Bush Administration so eager to fight? About this Walzer has nothing to say, except to take them at their word: "Delay is dangerous." To whom was it dangerous? Besides Kuwait, none of Iraq's neighbors supported the war, or even supported the sanctions. As for the threat to the United States: As Condoleezza Rice explained in early 2000, before assuming office, "If [the Iraqis] do acquire WMD, their weapons will be unusable because any attempt to use them will bring national obliteration."

Some of the war's opponents have speculated that the Bush Administration's motives included desire to establish a commanding military presence in the region where the most important natural resource in the world is located; eagerness to turn a large and potentially rich country into a virtually unregulated investors' paradise; a desire to impress the rest of the world once again with America's insuperable lead in military technology; a desire to exploit near-universal hatred of Saddam to legitimize (by establishing a precedent for) the doctrine of unilateral American military intervention expounded in the National Security Strategy document of September 2002; and, last but not (in the mind of Karl Rove)

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least, a wish to unify the country behind an Administration that was making a hash of the economy and environment in order to shovel cash at its campaign contributors. Walzer responsibly refrains from all such speculations.

He does, however, once again consider it important to chastise his opponents on the left. "Some of the most vocal organizers of the antiwar movement, here and in Europe...deny that the Iraqi regime is particularly ugly." How, he scolds, "can [Iraqi crimes] be ignored by a serious political movement?" As usual, Walzer offers no evidence that they have been. I myself have never heard anyone—except the Iraqi information minister—deny that Saddam's regime was "particularly ugly." I frankly doubt that Walzer has either.

Soft on the Bush Administration, tough on the left: Walzer's practice falls far short, it seems to me, of the ideal of social criticism that he has often preached. According to *Interpretation and Social Criticism* (1987), the critic ought to "challenge the leaders, the conventions, the ritual practices of a particular society," decrying, where necessary, its "public pronouncements and respectable opinion as hypocritical." One of the "tasks of the critic," he writes in *The Company of Critics* (1988), is "to question relentlessly the platitudes and myths of his society." The critic, he tells us in *Thick and Thin* (1994), "tears aside the veil" that his society's "leading members...draw over their everyday evasions and the more ugly features of the world they have made." I'm afraid all this doesn't sound much like Walzer to me. When it comes to the role of his favored states in international affairs, there is very little challenging, veil-tearing or relentless questioning. In this sphere, at least, Walzer's habitual stance is less that of dissenter than (mildly) critical supporter. ■

OBITUARY

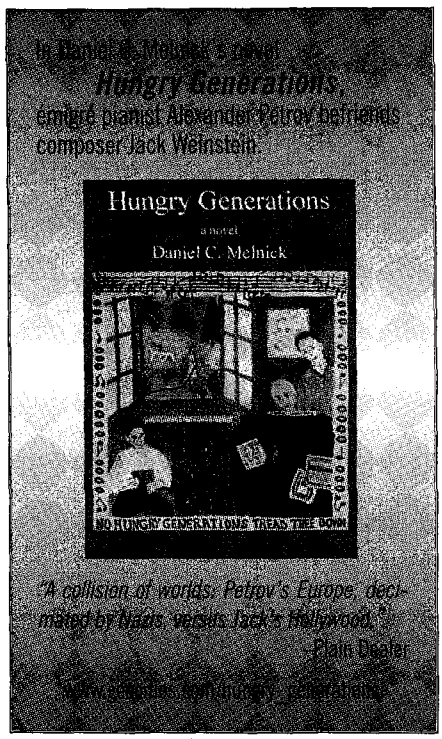
The Interpreters of Maladies

ADAM SHATZ

When Marx wrote, "The philosophers have only interpreted the world in various ways; the point, however, is to change it," he was not only taking a swipe at philosophers. He was slighting interpretation itself, as if thinking were an idle affair compared to action, where real men make their mark on the world. In fact, the act of interpretation is always an *act*, sometimes a veritable event, and, in rare instances, a harbinger of far-reaching changes. Maxime Rodinson, the distinguished scholar of the Arab and Muslim world who died at age 89 in Marseille on May 23, and Jacques Derrida, the philosopher of deconstruction who died at age 74 in Paris on October 8, were two of the most inspired interpreters of our time.

At first glimpse, Rodinson and Derrida would appear to have little in common. Rodinson was a student of Islamic history, Derrida of Western philosophy. Rodinson wrote to unveil the secrets of a world dimly understood by Europeans, Derrida to expose the hidden contradictions and incoherencies of what seemed most transparent about the canons of Western thought. The director of studies in the "historical ethnography of the Near East" at the prestigious École des Hautes Études in Paris, Rodinson was a proud heir of the tradition of Orientalist scholarship despite his sharp political differences with some of its practitioners; though universally admired in his field, he was hardly known outside it. Derrida, by contrast, was a glamorous maverick who attracted an international following for an idea that few could understand and that he himself seemed wary to spell out. Deconstruction's air of enigma only enhanced its appeal, as it "disseminated" (a favorite Derrida verb) into fields as disparate as architecture, theology, political theory, musicology, history, film and, of course, literary criticism, where it was even more influential than in Derrida's own discipline, which has resisted deconstruction as if it were a virus in philosophy's hard drive.

Where Rodinson was a fervent rationalist in the Enlightenment mold, Derrida relentlessly questioned the universality of Western reason, and at times displayed a streak of Jewish mysticism. While Rodinson wrote in a prose of impeccable lucidity, Derrida cultivated a style that was highly metaphoric, elusive, gnomic, teeming with paradox and wordplay, at times opaque to the point of self-parody ("Therefore we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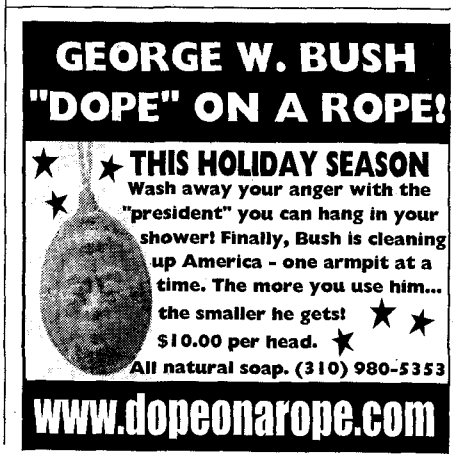
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will be incoherent, but without systematically resigning ourselves to incoherence"). In their approach to ideas they could hardly have been more different.

And yet there were deeper affinities. Both were left-wing, cosmopolitan Jews whose intellectual adventures—whose very identities—were shaped by what Derrida called "the passion of writing," which, in his view, defined a "certain Judaism," diasporic, itinerant, self-questioning, rooted in a fierce attachment to the Book rather than to the Land. (Isaac Deutscher would have described both men as "non-Jewish Jews," rebels against the constraints of religious tribalism.) Both were in love with language—Rodinson spoke thirty languages, including Arabic, Hebrew, Turkish and ancient Ethiopian; Derrida wrote about literature and poetry as often as he did about philosophy—and both were practitioners of exegesis, influenced, if only distantly, by the traditions of Talmudic scholarship. And as writers and citizens, both men sought to bridge the gap—without eliding the differences and tensions, in the name of some pious liberalism—between Arab and Jew, and between the intricate formations of culture and politics that we lazily call "East" and "West." The critique of Western ethnocentrism to which Rodinson contributed so formidably went hand in hand with the critique of Western metaphysics for which Derrida became renowned, as the philosopher himself acknowledged. Their projects were part of a long-overdue humbling of the West in the age of decolonization, a humbling that strengthened the foundations of the Enlightenment by holding it up to its own universalist standards.

"Maxime Rodinson is dead, but his work is not," the Algerian historian Mohammed Harbi wrote in an obituary in *Le Monde*. Indeed, if the French have pursued a far-sighted, balanced policy in the Middle East, it is partly because men like Jacques Chirac and Dominique de Villepin have listened to the sober wisdom of Rodinson and protégés like Gilles Kepel and Olivier Roy, rather than to the purring assurances of Fouad Ajami and Bernard Lewis.

Rodinson was born in 1915 in Marseille, the son of Russian-Polish working-class immigrants. Rodinson's parents were Communists, and he, too, joined the party as a young man. Yet it was not revolutionary Russia, the land of his parents, that captured his imagination but the Middle East. After studying at the École des Langues Orientales in Paris, Rodinson landed a job at the French Institute in Damascus—a haven, in 1940, from the gathering flames of French anti-Semitism. Eight years later he returned to France an orphan, his parents having been deported to Auschwitz by the Vichy authorities.

The murder of his parents did not, however, lead Rodinson to embrace Zionism, whose support among Jews had swiftly grown after the Holocaust, and whose triumph would ultimately lead to the expulsion of over 700,000 Palestinian Arabs—the Palestinian *Nakba*, or "catastrophe." If anything, the creation of Israel made him feel "a special duty" toward the people it had dispossessed: "I prefer to link myself to Judaism in this manner rather than others." As he put it:

> I would be the last to minimize the atrocity of Auschwitz, where my father and mother perished. But don't the tears of others count? Must I turn a blind eye to the tears caused by those who call themselves—and are to some degree—my congeners, even if they too are survivors of Auschwitz?... I am not saying...that it has attained the dimensions of Auschwitz, but many Jews have made many tears flow in the land of Palestine."

Vilified by his detractors as an uncritical apologist for the Arabs, he was nothing of the kind. "I have never subscribed to all the political attitudes, tactics, and strategies of the Arabs," he once said. "Arab intellectuals are well aware of this, and some of them have accused me...of being anti-Arab, anti-Islam, and even guilty of a crypto-Zionism all the more dangerous for its subtlety. The parallel between the apologetic methods (both defensive and offensive) of Zionism and those of the extreme forms of Arab nationalism, or of any nationalism for that matter, is striking."

Rodinson's experience in the Communist Party, with which he broke over Stalinism in 1958, left him with a horror of dogma and led him to renounce "the narrow subordination of efforts at lucidity to the exigencies of mobilization, even for just causes." From then on, he was a free man, and in the following decade Rodinson published some of the seminal texts in Middle Eastern studies, including *Mohammed* (1961), a biography still banned in parts of the Arab world for approaching the Prophet's life from a sociological perspective, and *Islam and Capitalism* (1966), a study of the economic decline of Muslim societies. Although he remained an independent (or, as he quipped, "agnostic") Marxist, he appreciated the powerful role that religion played in the Arab world at a time when many European leftist observers of the region preferred to see it as a form of false consciousness that would melt into air once the Arab masses awakened to their "true" class interests.

After the 1967 Arab-Israeli war, Rodinson distinguished himself as a leading champion of the Palestinian struggle for self-determination, publishing a major article in Jean-Paul Sartre's journal, *Les Temps modernes*, under the title "Israël, fait colonial," and establishing the Groupe de Recherches et d'Actions pour la Palestine with his colleague Jacques Berque, the renowned scholar of the Maghreb. The bravery of Rodinson's position at the time can hardly be overstated, and not only because he was Jewish. In 1967, owing in large part to guilt over the Holocaust, Israel still enjoyed the unconditional support of much of the European left, including Sartre. By contrast, as Rodinson sadly observed in an interview with a PLO-affiliated journal, pro-Palestinian sentiment in the West tended to be confined to the anti-Semitic right and the Maoist fringes of the left: "Are these the milieux that you want to win over?" Thus did he urge the Palestinians to take their case to liberal Europeans and not "simply write off people who, at a given moment, have expressed sentiments of sympathy towards Israel and the Israeli people." He also warned, presciently but with less success, that "in the ardor of the ideological struggle against Zionism, those Arabs most influenced by a Muslim religious orientation would seize upon the old religious and popular prejudices against the Jews in general" and further tarnish the reputation of a just cause in the West. "The question is whether the Arabs want to continue to accord Zionism such valuable assistance."

Though unwavering in his support of Palestinian rights, Rodinson made no secret of his disagreements with the PLO; and because he offered his counsel as a friend, he earned the trust and respect of his interlocutors. To be sure, the Palestinian people have suffered no shortage of friends since the 1982 Israeli invasion of Lebanon, when liberal opinion in the West began to turn overwhelmingly against the occupation and in favor of a Palestinian state. But, like the Kurds, they have had few friends who have spoken to them as honestly as Rodinson did. He sought to disabuse his contacts in the PLO of their most dangerous illusions, starting with the idea that Israel's Jews could be driven out by guerrilla warfare, as the *colons* had been in Algeria. While he regarded Israel as a colonial-

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settler state, the creation of the state was now a fact, and "the time for questioning its wisdom is past. A tree must be judged by its fruits." Israeli Jews were an ethnonational community, not, as he remarked in a 1969 speech before the Egyptian Popular Assembly, "a heterogeneous collection of gangs of occupiers who could be sent back where they came from with the greatest of ease." As such, Israeli Jews had collective rights which Palestinians would have to honor in order to secure a just and lasting peace: "If there are two or more ethnic groups in the same country, and if the danger of the domination of one by the other is to be avoided, then both these groups must be represented as distinct communities at the political level, and each must be accorded the right to defend its interests and aspirations."

While speaking frankly to his Palestinian friends, Rodinson never forgot on whose side lay the preponderance of power—and therefore responsibility. Israel, he stressed, could not turn its back on its neighbors and pretend that it was a part of Europe, nor could it forever postpone a reckoning with the injustices it had committed against the Palestinian people. Until Israel faced these facts, all its paeans to peace would ring hollow in the Arab world:

> Instead of simply demanding, as it has done for 20 years, that the Arabs accept its presence as a fait accompli, it could offer, in the name of fairness, to compensate for the injustice that has been done.... The Jewish state is no longer a dream built on a 2,000 year old myth; it is a national fact, build on a few decades of hard work and suffering. But the only chance it has of gaining the acceptance it so craves from its neighbors is by adopting a language of conciliation and compromise.... Could there be some hope that these people, who declare themselves to be builders and planters above all else, might choose this path to survival?

Like Rodinson, Jacques Derrida was profoundly troubled by what he described as "the disastrous and suicidal policies of Israel—and of a certain Zionism." This sense of torment, of being at odds with so many of his fellow Jews, meant that "I have a hard time saying 'we.'" Yet, "in spite of all this and all the problems I have with my own 'Jewishness,' I will *never* deny it.... This tortured 'we,'" he added, "is at the heart of all that is most disquieting in my thought."

Unlike Rodinson, Derrida came from the Muslim world, a native of El Biar in French colonial Algeria. The Egyptian-Jewish writer Edmund Jabès, he would later write, "teaches us that roots speak, that words want to grow, and that poetic discourse *takes root* in a wound." Derrida's poetic discourse grew out of the wound of his traumatic exile from Algeria, which he left for Paris at age 19 to attend the École Normale Supérieure. The link between an author's work and his biography is, to be sure, complex, and sometimes tenuous, and Derrida long shied away from discussing his personal life, and from even having his picture taken. But in his last years he finally began to speak of his Algerian childhood, of being a Jew in a colonial society, and acknowledged that "my own life and desires are inscribed in all of my writing."

The son of a salesman, he was born Jackie Derrida (he later adopted a "correct" French version of his name) in 1930. The Derridas were Spanish Sephardim who fled to Algeria during the Inquisition. (In his work Derrida expressed a special kinship with Marrand, a fourteenth-century Jew who practiced his religion in secret.) Neither European settlers nor Muslims, they were a people-in-between, raising suspicions on both sides of the progressively hardening native-settler divide. The predicament of Algeria's Jews, who numbered more than 100,000 by the mid-twentieth century, had been further complicated by the 1870 Crémieux Decrees, which granted them French citizenship—a reform that elicited furious protests from anti-Semitic *pieds noirs*, while driving a wedge between Jewish Algerians and the disenfranchised Muslim majority, with whom they had enjoyed peaceful relations for centuries.

"I took part in an extraordinary transformation of French Judaism in Algeria," Derrida recalled in a recent interview. "My great-grandparents were still very close to the Arabs by language, customs, etc. After the Crémieux Decrees...the next generation became bourgeois: although she was married almost secretly in the backyard of the mayor of Algiers because of the pogroms during the Dreyfus Affair, my grandmother raised her daughters as if they were bourgeois Parisians, with the good manners of the 16th arrondissement." By the time Derrida was born, the family spoke neither Ladino nor Arabic but French, having passionately assimilated the language of their colonizers. "That is why," he explained, "there is in my writing a somewhat violent, not to say perverse, way of treating this language. Because of love...I only have one language, and at the same time this language does not belong to me."

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The renaissance of French-Algerian Judaism came to a sudden end in 1940, with the rise of Vichy. Goaded by anti-Semitic *pieds noirs*, the Vichy authorities in Algeria annulled the Crémieux Decrees, and within a year Derrida was expelled from school. "French culture is not made for little Jews," his teacher informed him. Abandoned by the European community, the Derridas received comfort from their Muslim neighbors, who, unlike many colonized peoples and to their lasting credit, refused to ally themselves with the Axis powers against their colonial masters; Derrida never forgot this experience, which gave him a more nuanced, less fatalistic perspective on Arab-Jewish relations than that of many of his co-religionists in France.

Away from school, the young man developed a passion for philosophy, partly in rebellion against the synagogue he attended with his parents:

> There were aspects of Judaism I loved—the music, for instance. Nonetheless, I started resisting religion as a young adolescent, not in the name of atheism, but because...religion as it was practiced in my family...struck me as thoughtless, just blind repetitions.... Then when I was 13, I read Nietzsche for the first time, and though I didn't understand him completely, he made a big impression on me. The diary I kept then was filled with quotations from Nietzsche and Rousseau, who was my other god at the time.

After the Allies landed in Algiers, Derrida resumed his education, and the Crémieux Decrees were restored. Yet life in French Algeria was never the same again. Having contributed to the defeat of fascism as soldiers in De Gaulle's Free French Forces, Algeria's Muslims began to rebel against the French occupation of their own country. The first clashes took place on V-Day, 1945, when dozens of Europeans died in pro-independence demonstrations. With help from *pied noir* "ultras," the French Army proceeded to slaughter tens of thousands of Muslims in the towns of Sétif and Guelma—"the first serious outbursts heralding the Algerian war" that broke out nine years later, as Derrida recalled. Following the 1945 massacres, Algerian politics increasingly hinged on a zero-sum struggle between settlers and natives—on what Derrida famously called a "binary opposition."

Where did Jews like the Derridas fit into this equation? After all, they had benefited from assimilation, only to be cruelly betrayed by Algeria's French population; and though they were "natives," not *colons*, they were not Muslims, and they had come to identify fervently with French republicanism. Apart from a tiny minority of Algerian-Jewish radicals who joined the FLN, most Jews either sided with the European community or adopted an impossible position of neutrality. When Algeria achieved independence in 1962, Derrida's family joined the general exodus of Jews to France.

Derrida was already in Paris, making a name for himself as a daring interpreter of Husserl and Heidegger. Still, it is more than possible that his suspicion of binary oppositions (between writing and speech, philosophy and literature, self and other, and, much to the chagrin of his colleagues in philosophy, sense and nonsense) arose from his family's liminal status in colonial Algeria. It is also likely that Derrida's sensitivity to the contradictions of even the most stable systems arose from having witnessed, in his youth, the transformation of an entire way of life that had once seemed eternal. What, in a 1966 lecture at Johns Hopkins, he would call "play"—code for the subtle shifts and realignments that subvert every structure, whether of thought, language, government or economy—had exposed the instability of *Algérie Française* and would ultimately trigger a "rupture" of historic proportions.

That now famous talk was titled "Structure, Sign and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences," and it amounted to a direct and insouciant challenge to the eminent anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss, whose theory of "structuralism" had cast a spell over French historians, sociologists, literary critics and philosophers with its vision of self-regulating, perfectly articulated structures of language, custom and politics. As Derrida pointed out, structuralism could explain brilliantly why systems survived, but not why they changed. Because they emphasized structure at the expense of play, Lévi-Strauss and his disciples could only "conceive of the origin of a new structure on the model of catastrophe." The idea of a structure with a center, he argued, merely "expresses the force of a desire." For Derrida, nothing in life is stable, nothing is impervious to the subversions of play—not political systems, not language, not meaning itself.

Derrida took play seriously; it was a synonym, really, for the unexpected reversals of history with which he was intimately acquainted. Even at his most somber, this spirit infused Derrida's work, whether he was writing on Plato, Heidegger, Stéphane Mallarmé, Freud, Artaud or the American Declaration of Independence. In his writing he developed a voice as original as Jean-Luc Godard's—alternately inspired and maddening, animated by a similarly Joycean predilection for puns and collages of association, and a melancholy fascination with specters of the past that haunt the present, or "traces," as Derrida called them. The two men also shared an interest in the French-Jewish philosopher Emmanuel Levinas, whose ruminations on the dialectic of Self and Other figure prominently in Godard's latest film, *Notre Musique*, a beautifully fractured meditation on the wars in Bosnia and Israel-Palestine.

Derrida's undisguised delight in play led him to be accused of the sins of "relativism" and "nihilism." In fact, he had a high regard for truth and for the protocols of scholarship. If he sought to shake the certainties of philosophy, it was not out of a sense of nihilism, or even anarchist mischief, but rather a principled distrust of orthodoxies. Humility about the limits of our knowledge is among the central lessons one draws from Derrida, who, by all accounts, was a deeply modest, generous and fragile man, haunted throughout his life by a sense of his own mortality. In a touching interview published a few months before his death from pancreatic cancer, Derrida told Jean Birnbaum of *Le Monde* that "to do philosophy is to learn how to die.... I believe in this truth without having surrendered to it.... I haven't learned to accept death."

Another charge that stalked Derrida throughout his career was that he was an enemy of the Enlightenment, indeed of reason itself, and that deconstruction was a sinister anti-Western doctrine. It is true, of course, that Derrida lambasted the philosophical tradition for having marginalized "women, children, animals and slaves." In a 1974 essay, he notoriously described metaphysics as a "white mythology which reassembles and reflects the culture of the West," a mythology "the white man takes...for the universal form of...Reason." Deconstruction was, he proudly declared, "a gesture of distrust with respect to Eurocentrism," as well as to "phallogocentrism."

Not surprisingly, feminist and post-colonial literary critics drew inspiration from Derrida's critique of "white mythologies." More often than not, however, they overlooked the profound tribute his work paid to the Western canon; his distrust was that of a lover, not a prosecutor. As Derrida pointed out, "even when [deconstruction] is directed against something European, it is

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European.... Since the Enlightenment, Europe has always criticized itself, and in this perfectible heritage, there is a chance for the future." In an age of uncontested American dominance, he said in one of his last interviews, Europe "has responsibilities to assume, for the future of humanity, for that of international law—that is my faith, my belief." Among these responsibilities, he argued, was the creation of a European army independent of NATO, "neither offensive nor defensive nor preventive," that "would intervene without delay in the service of resolutions finally respected by a new UN (for example, in all urgency, in Israel, but also elsewhere)."

In his political commitments, he displayed the same rigorous skepticism that defined his writing. While he spoke out on behalf of the oppressed—Czechs under Stalinism, South Africans under apartheid, Palestinians under occupation, Algerians under military rule—he kept his distance from political parties and never glorified "revolutionary" states or exalted political violence, unlike many French intellectuals of his generation, notably his colleague and rival Michel Foucault. And, as he affirmed his fundamental attachment to the ideals of the Enlightenment late in his career, he came around to the view that some things could not be deconstructed, among them friendship, justice and—though he was not a believer—the "name of God," a metaphor for "the unconditional," and for the promise of redemption. As he explained: "We are by nature messianic. We cannot *not* be, because we exist in a state of expecting something to happen. Even if we're in a state of hopelessness, a sense of expectation is an integral part of our relationship to time."

This sense of expectation, he said, was not faith-based, and

> does not belong to any determined religion. The conflict with Iraq involved numerous religious elements, from all sides—from the Christian side as well as from the Muslim side. What I call messianicity without messianism is a call, a promise of an independent future for what is to come, and which comes like every messiah in the shape of peace and justice, a promise independent of religion, that is to say universal. A promise independent of the three religions when they oppose each other, since in fact it is a war between three Abrahamic religions. A promise beyond the Abrahamic religions, universal, without relation to revelations or to the history of religions."

Amen, Jackie, and *adieu*. ■

LETTERS
CONTINUED

(Continued From Page 2)

denial is but one part of this rich diasporan culture. Any basic Geertzian and Turnerian understanding of culture (even with a Cliffordian caveat for contested difference) would have allowed Toumani to reflect on the fact that most Armenian-Americans share a system of complex symbols and images, a set of rituals, a system of gestures and encoded languages and, yes, indeed a shared history—one of the essential realities that all cultural communities are bound by. PETER BALAKIAN

TOUMANI REPLIES

Brooklyn, NY

■ Peter Balakian's response fails to engage my fundamental point: that diasporas identify themselves in relation to a homeland, but that the psychological and material needs of the diaspora may be radically different from—and may even clash with—the needs of that homeland. In the case of the Armenian diaspora, this tension is particularly relevant because most diasporan Armenians profess a strong sense of dedication to the success of the new Armenian state and feel a deep affection for that culture and country.

When I visited Armenia last year, I found people were far less interested in Turkey's recognition of the genocide than in seeing the border with Turkey reopened so that they could have normal commerce and interactions with their neighbor. Some suggested that economic relationships between Armenian and Turkish businesspeople could be the foundation for mending the longstanding bitterness between the two groups. Unfortunately, such relationships are impossible without an open border; and many argued that the intransigent behavior of diaspora Armenians on the genocide issue had fostered continuing hostility between the two states.

Is seeking redress for the murders of people who died eighty years ago worth it if it means preventing the improvement of the lives of a whole nation of people now alive? It's a horrible, sad question, but until Turkey establishes diplomatic relations with Armenia, it's unfair—and morally skewed, to use Balakian's words—not to ask how diaspora behavior affects Turkey's attitude toward Armenia.

Rather than considering this complicated scenario, Balakian repeats the talking points that Armenian-Americans are supposed to include anytime they get a few moments of airtime. In doing so, he wrongly implies that I suggest that Turkey's denial of the Armenian genocide is OK.

Balakian also accuses me of not understanding the Armenian diaspora's relationship to its history. His list of cultural theorists notwithstanding, I draw on memories of Armenian summer camp in America (a rite of passage for Armenian-American youth), where regions of the campground were named for Armenian battlefields. Hideous songs about war, bloodshed and revenge against Turks constituted the

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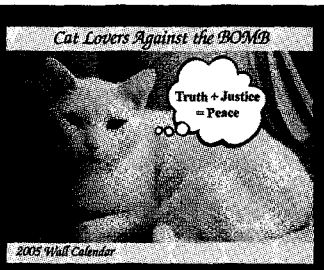

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LETTERS
CONTINUED

daily sing-a-long. (Granted, few involved in the passion plays understood the Armenian words, another peculiarity of these expressions of nationalism.) When I told Armenians in Armenia of this, they stared at me in disbelief.

Balakian accuses me of ignoring the psychology of inherited trauma. But the idea that grief and loss are transmitted across generations is not at odds with my argument. For later generations of Armenians in the diaspora, knowledge of the genocide manifests itself in many ways: deep pity, guilt, a sense of importance for having a dramatic history and confusion over the divided ethnic identity that results from a dispersion. I contend that the powerful need to honor and assert this sense of ethnic identity is, above all, what fuels the diaspora's campaign for genocide recognition. This is not to forgive Turkey or to minimize the horror of genocide; it is simply to be honest about what drives human beings. This also helps explain, in part, why Armenians in Armenia—whose ethnic identity is not in question—feel less compelled to emphasize this part of their history. MELINE TOUMANI

COLOMBIA, NO GEM OF THE OCEAN

Somerville, Mass.

■ Peter Canby's review "Latin America's Longest War" [Aug. 16/23] provides an insightful introduction to the sad and violent situation in Colombia, where 90 percent of workers earn no more than the minimum wage of about $120 per month. A few clarifications: Canby implies that three US contractors held by the leftist FARC guerrillas since early 2003 were piloting crop dusters. In fact, they were employed by California Microwave Systems (CMS), a subsidiary of military contractor Northrop Grumman, to conduct aerial surveillance in an area with a long-standing guerrilla presence. While the Americans were certainly interested in coca crops and cocaine laboratories, their mission was also part of the counterinsurgency. Their photographs provided intelligence on guerrilla activities just as surely as they identified the more easily camouflaged coca crops and drug laboratories. The CMS employees were veteran US military personnel working in the military services industry. They were accompanied by a Colombian army sergeant, and the national daily *El Tiempo* reported that their aircraft was participating in military operations "directly coordinated by US military personnel." This illustrates the merger of the 2002–03 drug and antiterrorist (read counterinsurgency) wars. The fate of the three Americans is tied to that of other high-value captives, like former presidential candidate Ingrid Betancourt. FARC wants to sign a "humanitarian accord" to exchange prisoners and "humanize" the conflict, but the Colombian government refuses to talk without a cease-fire. President Álvaro Uribe has a visceral hatred for FARC, who killed his father when he was 14. The captive high-tech mercenaries are largely ignored in Colombia and abandoned by Washington. To most Colombians, they certainly deserve no more consideration than the thousands of Colombian citizens in equally distressing circumstances.

Canby correctly points out that President Uribe "has demonstrated a willingness to move against not just the guerrillas but also the paramilitaries," while indicating that government action against the paras has been "cautious." One could draw a starker distinction between Uribe's approach to the two illegal groups, however. Uribe proposed to allow the paramilitary commanders, considered responsible for 90 percent of human rights violations, to receive "alternative punishment" for war crimes and cocaine trafficking that would have involved no jail time. When that was disallowed by the courts, he offered to have them negotiate their own punishments as did Pablo Escobar, the powerful drug trafficker who had the government build him a luxury jail in the 1980s. In contrast, Uribe has consistently rejected FARC's overtures for even a humanitarian accord. When the United States invaded Afghanistan, he expressed the wish that after finishing off the terrorists there, the Americans would come to FARC–dominated areas of Colombia to "do the same." Uribe's differing attitude to the two groups came through in recent comments to a BBC interviewer when he said that the actions of all illegal armed actors were unacceptable, including those of FARC, who intended "to subjugate Colombia," and those of the paramilitaries, who wished "to defend Colombia." This recalls Canby's humorous description of the paras as "the armed wing of the middle class" in defense against guerrilla kidnapping for profit, but it also reminds us that the paras sprang from the private antiguerrilla armies of wealthy ranchers.

Canby states that "in the midst of the post-9/11 hysteria, the Bush Administration requested and received authorization from Congress to declare FARC a terrorist threat [thus allowing] the United States to use its drug funds and helicopters in anti-FARC operations." However, the State Department had already declared FARC a "designated foreign terrorist organization," in 1997.

Finally, Canby points out that FARC is far from being defeated and may have "simply retreated…to wait out the end of Uribe's term," a plausible conjecture when it was written. But this past summer, the guerrillas carried out their most deadly offensive against the armed forces in recent years. In November, another guerrilla group, the ELN, also staged an unusually large attack against the national police.

If readers come away from Canby's insightful review with a greater appreciation of the Colombian labyrinth, they should understand that neither drugs, terrorism nor guerrilla war are responsible for the social crisis in the country, and that efforts based solely on their eradication will inevitably fail to solve it. ANDY KLATT

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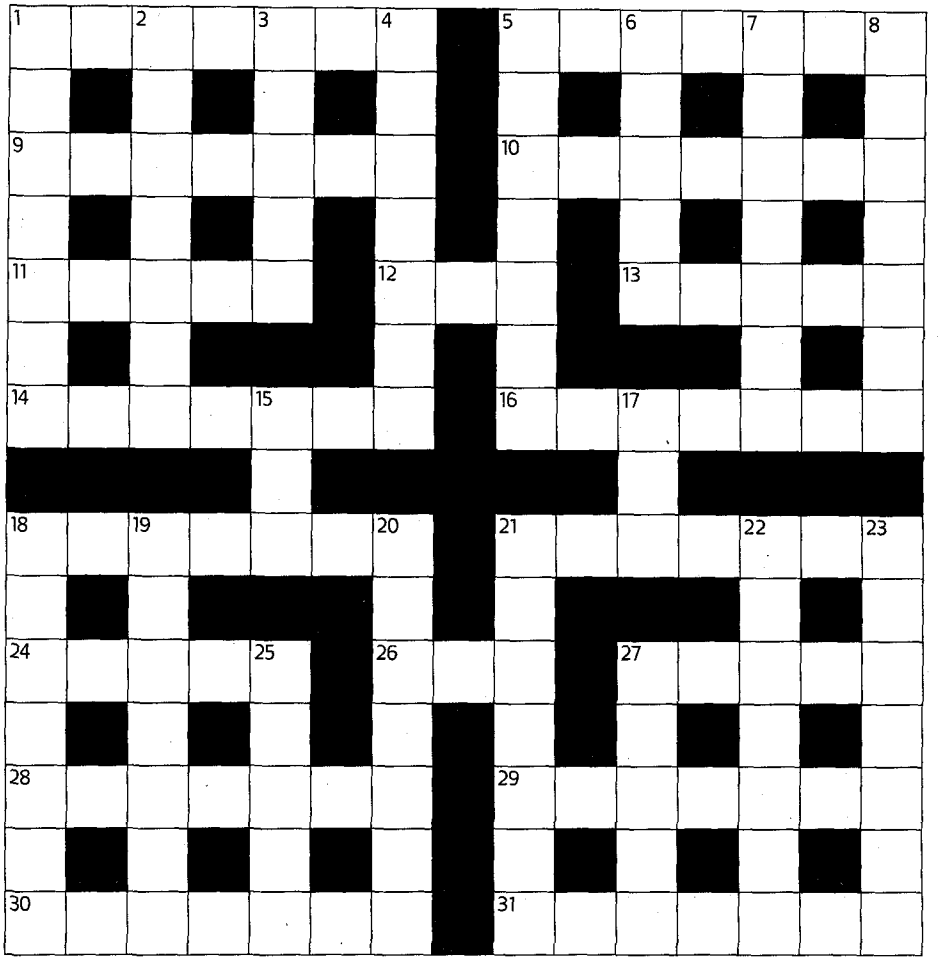

ACROSS

1 It's funny, but the rib lies awkwardly here. (7)

5 Can get it confused in the capital of Italy, but a lot of people find it there. (7)

9 Implies verse is a lot more out of the ordinary, but this is literally straightforward. (7)

10 Just the same, it's confused by the artist! (7)

11, 12 and **13** What a hound should be able to do as well as catch flies, perhaps—but it describes the sport. (5,3,5)

14 Dad is in, but confused, which makes him put his nose in the air. (7)

16 Implies you hung around only one part of the house, but it could be long due. (7)

18 Where in France and a border state you can get married around it, you probably won't say it doesn't hurt if you are. (7)

21 Perhaps I see around the limb, but they usually imply someone died. (7)

24 and **26** Custer had a last one first, but finally it's not on—just undecided. (5-3)

27 See 3 down

28 Jason's ship is headed 30 degrees to reach the battle site. (7)

29 One usually says goodbye so, which happens and happens again! (7)

30 Tinsel's spread around, as one hears. (7)

31 They are supposed to be pretty fishy, when heading for trouble. (7)

DOWN

1 Said to be when Rudolph, for example, rises and gets put inside. (7)

2 Originally war cries could be expected to attract the attention of customers, without (as Parisians say) keeping the record. (7)

3, 15 and **27** across People put things down in it, to be exact—which could be considered biracial. (5,3,5)

4 It's a small type with the sort of china that serves as a way to really hold you! (7)

5 Perhaps more directed upward when you get to do over the place! (7)

6 The pattern seriously followed when little Thomas got up, conditionally. (5)

7 Sent wrong to urge one on with something to look forward to, upon retirement. (4,3)

8 You'll find me upset, and finished, over what the editor did! (7)

15 See 3

17 See 25

18 Once a sort of bowl existed just to glide over the water! (7)

19 Being accepted socially, above the noise, is just for certain people. (7)

20 Those in the medical profession are about finished, each one of them being tender. (7)

21 It might look cute on your forehead, showing little spirit to keep things secure. (7)

22 What you might do to show your approval first. (7)

23 Transportation for supposedly jolly types making kills, by the sound of it. (7)

25 and **17** A fancy word for a hoofer, showing a musically macabre type has a purpose. (8)

27 The old person almost sounds 27 across—disproving "No man is an island." (5)

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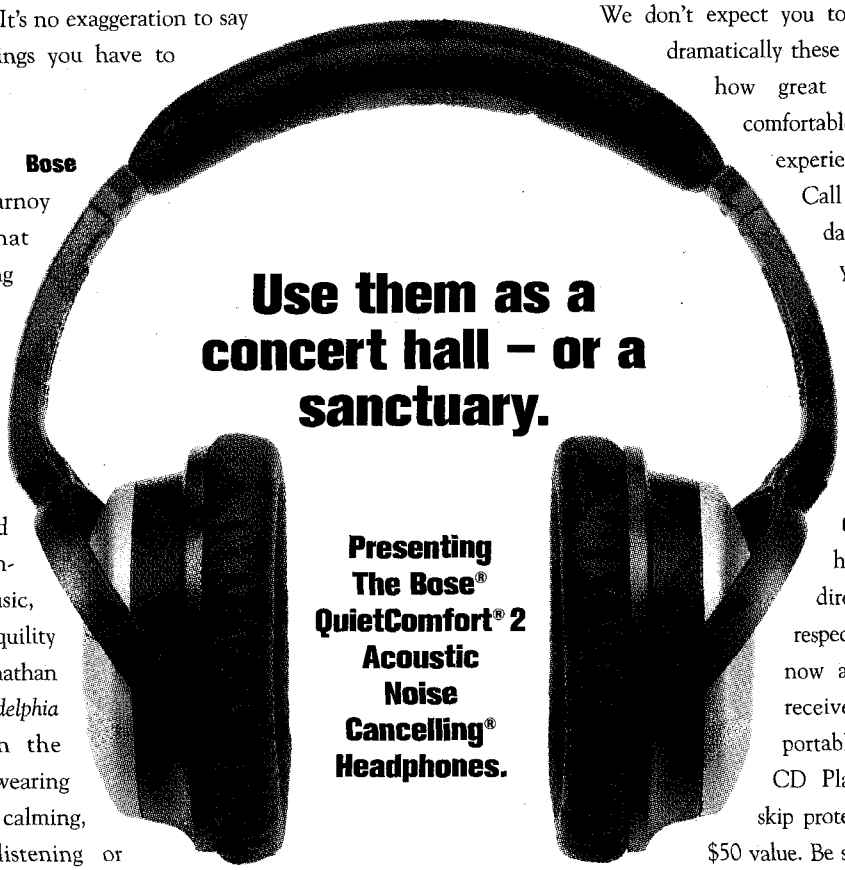

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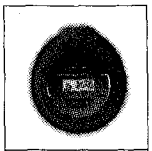

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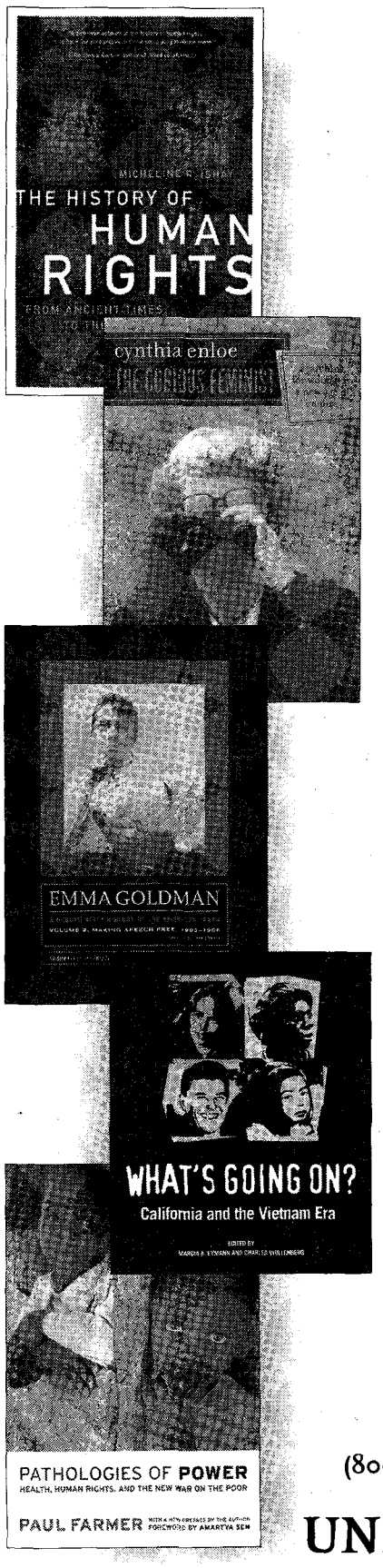

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